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A Matter of Life and Death: Jose Maria Arguedas, Mario Vargas Llosa, and the Postmodern Condition.

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A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH:
JOSÉ MARÍA ARGUEDAS, MARIO VARGAS LLOSA,
AND THE POSTMODERN CONDITION

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Interdepartmental Program in Comparative Literature

by

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ABSTRACT

Despite all that has been written in recent years on the subject of literary postmodernism, theorists and critics have yet to arrive at consensus about the meaning of the term. In the context of Latin America, the theoretical disagreement is given an added dimension by an ongoing debate over whether the notion of postmodernism, in any of its manifestations, is relevant to contemporary Latin American letters.

This study maintains that at least some of the issues raised in the debate over postmodernism are not only relevant, but crucial to an understanding of the many complex worlds of Latin America at the end of the twentieth century. These issues, which include societal fragmentation, radical heterogeneity, multiple and often conflicting values, and a sense of disorientation and purposeless, directionless wandering, are nowhere as painfully apparent as in contemporary Peru.

The study examines the strategies by which Peruvian novelists José María Arguedas and Mario Vargas Llosa explore these issues, not merely as a literary or intellectual exercise, but as a matter of life and death,

the seriousness of which is borne out by the fact that in each case the search culminates in what appears to be a grand, irrevocable gesture that indicates despair. A close, comparative reading of three novels by each of the two authors traces the evolution of their thought, and attempts to establish some links between the insights at which they arrive and the gestures of despair. The novels considered are Los ríos profundos, Todas las sangres, and El zorro de arriba y el zorro de abajo by Arguedas, and La casa verde, El hablador, and Lituma en los Andes by Vargas Llosa. Finally, the study arrives at and argues for the conclusion that the despair Arguedas and Vargas Llosa express is not, after all, the product of the contemplation of postmodern chaos; rather, it stems from the only partially acknowledged discovery of a deeper, darker, more terrible order that defies understanding, yet demands to be understood.

CHAPTER ONE
POSTMODERNISM AND LATIN AMERICAN FICTION

"¡Si mencionas posmodernismo, saco la pistola!"¹ [If you mention postmodernism, I'll take out my pistol!]. Overheard at an academic conference, this apparently offhand remark offers a glimpse of the tense atmosphere surrounding the ongoing controversy over a loosely connected, imperfectly articulated collection of ideas, attitudes, and concerns called postmodernism. The casual jocularity of the tone characterizes a debate which at one level appears to be an exercise in studied frivolity and academic hipness, while the violence of the language suggests the serious, even threatening nature of at least some of the issues under consideration. That the remark was made in the context of a discussion of contemporary Latin American literature calls attention to the fact that a number of Latin American texts from the latter half of the twentieth century have not only been dragged into the postmodern arena, but have also, by virtue of the subjects they explore, become integral to the debate. In particular, Peruvian novelists José María Arguedas (1911-

¹ This and all subsequent translations are mine, unless otherwise indicated.

1969) and Mario Vargas Llosa (b. 1936) deal with some of postmodernism's most difficult issues in both their art and their personal lives, in ways that suggest that coming to terms with the postmodern condition is not a frivolous pursuit at all, and can indeed become a matter of life and death.

While it is perhaps futile to attempt to define a way of thinking that rejects closed concepts such as "definitions," it is worthwhile to point out some well-documented characteristics common to the various manifestations of postmodern thought. The rejection of the notion of progress based on Enlightenment rationality, the abandonment of *grands récits* for what Jean- François Lyotard calls "radical heterogeneity," and the radical questioning of the concept of reality, are important components of postmodernism. Equally important is a profound mistrust of anything that appears solid, permanent, or absolute, including "those discourses which set out to address a transcendental Subject, to define an essential human nature, to prescribe a global human destiny or to proscribe collective human goals" (Hebdige 81). There is in addition an attempt to deconstruct binaries upon which traditional conceptions of the world are based, including, and of particular relevance for this study, the

notion of the center and the periphery. In Etienne Balibar's words, "we are faced with the disturbing impression that most 'peripheries' remain desperately peripheral, while the 'central' position of the traditional 'centers' is not so secure" (408). Finally, there is a deep suspicion that what passes for originality is nothing more than what Fredric Jameson terms *pastiche*, "a neutral practice of . . . mimicry, without any of parody's ulterior motives" (Postmodernism 12), in which "the random cannibalization of all the styles of the past . . . approaches Plato's conception of the simulacrum, the identical copy for which no original has ever existed" (18).

Ironically, some of the strongest objections to postmodernism are couched in postmodern terms; namely, that postmodern thinking is itself an example of *pastiche* in that it is "simply a continuation of Modernism . . . now tolerated and even actively cultivated by the very bourgeoisie [it] had once scandalized" (Raymond Williams 23); that suspicion of *grands récits* is "at least as old as the Enlightenment which was so productive of grand narratives in the first place" (Callinicos 10); and that the prefix *post-* conveys a false sense of closure. In Raymond Williams' words:

[S]ince Modernism is here in this specific phase or period, there is nothing behind it. . . . Modernism being the terminus, everything afterwards is counted out of development. It is *after*; stuck in the *post*. (34-35; emphasis in the original)

Even more ironic, though hardly surprising, is the suggestion that postmodernism has taken on some of the characteristics of a metanarrative. For Juan Poblete, "[l]a paradoja de la posmodernidad es . . . que . . . se constituye, necesariamente, en una homogeneísta afirmación de la heterogeneidad" [the paradox of postmodernity is that it necessarily constitutes a homogenist affirmation of heterogeneity] (121), while in Andrew Ross' view, postmodernism represents yet another Western European claim to universality:

Western Enlightenment philosophy . . . creates a world of universals in order to imagine itself as universal for the rest of the world. . . . [P]ostmodernism has become a convenient rallying point around which Western intellectuals have gathered to debate the continuing worth or the wholesale abandonment of the universal propositions. . . . [T]he alacrity with which its participants have sprung to debate these large questions signals in itself the resurrection of the position of the "universal intellectual" . . . who speaks as, and on behalf of, the consciousness of society as a whole. (xiii)

Hovering above and around the debate is an uneasy awareness of being caught in what Homi Bhabha calls "a moment *in medias res*, from in between unequal and often antagonistic sites, without the certainty of imagining what

happens or emerges at the end" (57). Adding to the discomfort is a sense of vulnerability that comes from being unable to locate or define the antagonist. In a conversation with Stuart Hall, Fredric Jameson observes: "We don't have a dominant class sitting up there and . . . doing it to us anymore. It's being done to them too" (29), while Hall adds that "[t]he dispersal of what used to be called 'the enemy' into a whole system leads to the difficulty of putting together any kind of oppositional politics" (31). It should be noted that even the word "system" implies a kind of order that might very well not be there, and that it is the absence of any kind of system at all that is truly frightening to contemplate.

In L'écriture et la différence, in what appears to be an inadvertent acknowledgment of the difficulty of avoiding binary thinking altogether, Jacques Derrida divides postmodern thought into opposing sides that nevertheless complement each other:

la face triste, *négative*, nostalgique, coupable, rousseauiste de la pensée du jeu dont l'*affirmation* nietzschéenne, l'*affirmation* joyeuse du jeu du monde et de l'innocence du devenir, l'*affirmation* d'un monde de signes sans faute, sans vérité, sans origine, offert à une interprétation active, serait l'autre face.
(427; emphasis in the original)

[the saddened, *negative*, nostalgic, guilty, Rousseauistic side of the thinking of play whose other side would be the Nietzschean *affirmation*,

that is the joyous affirmation of the play of the world and the innocence of becoming, the affirmation of a world without origin which is offered to an active interpretation] (Adams 1125).

In a similar vein, Raymond Williams classifies proponents of postmodernism as either "euphoric" or "dyspeptic" (3-5). Euphoric postmodernists view the postmodern condition in a quasi-utopian light, as an opportunity to see the world in an entirely new way and to engage in open-ended dialogue in the Bakhtinian sense; or, they cheerfully abandon themselves to the freedom, diversity, and chaotic revelry of the postmodern carnival. The dyspeptic attitude, conversely, is one of aloof cynicism, of observing and reporting on the postmodern spectacle without actively participating in it, and is succinctly summarized by the comedian George Carlin, who declared in an interview that "[t]he greatest entertainment I have in my life is chronicling . . . the slow dissolution of order" (Young 56).

Those who reject outright the idea of postmodernism include critics from both the Left and the Right who, interestingly enough, not only share common objections to postmodern ideas, but coincide in accusing postmodern thinkers of collaborating with the opposition. Writing

from the perspective of the British Left, Christopher Norris asserts:

It is a short step from the claims of postmodern sceptical historiography . . . to the arguments of prosletysing right-wing historians who more or less openly advocate a return to the teaching of history as a vehicle for Thatcherite values and principles. (40)

Martín Hopenhayn agrees that postmodernism has been drawn into the service of capitalism and the market economy:

It is no accident that elements of what we are calling the postmodern narrative have been disseminated . . . by neoliberals and disenchanted leftists seduced by anarcho-capitalism. (98)

Writing from an entirely different political perspective, David Hirsch uses similar arguments to attack postmodern skepticism toward truth-claims. In his view, postmodernism is nothing less than a fabricated excuse for the holocaust, among other twentieth-century horrors:

All too often, the discourses of twentieth-century philosophy . . . are self-deceiving and anti-human. They have been forged in the shadow of a guilt that will not go away, and that has not yet been faced. In seeking to turn away from the truth of a painful past they resolutely mock the idea of truth itself. . . . One of the unfortunate, but perhaps not unintended, consequences of deconstructionist nihilism is the imposition of the dogma that all human acts must remain morally undifferentiated, since *différance* exists only in the language system . . . [and] the only difference between a collaborator and a resister is the difference in sound images. (129-30)

Lynne Cheney, former director of the National Endowment for the Humanities, echoes Hirsch's concerns and adds to them the fear that skepticism toward absolutes marks the beginning of a process by which traditional moral values are destroyed and replaced by an unwelcome, even dangerous, political agenda based on the rationalization that "[w]e cannot know the truth, so we should abandon the pursuit of it in scholarship and in the classroom--and advance whatever is politically useful" (20).

While voices from both extremes of the political spectrum concur in their fears that the absence of absolute values invites anarchy and that postmodern detachment from social and political issues constitutes capitulation to the enemy, they at the same time profoundly disagree about the nature of the threatened values or the threatening enemy. At the same time, additional voices, primarily from the Left, are attempting, with only marginal success in my opinion, to reconcile the need for social and political action with the recognition that there are no longer any foundational principles from which to act. For Antonio Gramsci, the absence of universal, absolute values can be considered advantageous in that it forces intellectuals to abandon theory and become activists:

The mode of being of the new intellectual can no longer consist in eloquence . . . but in active

participation in practical life, as constructor, organiser, 'permanent persuader' and not just simple orator. (10)

While what Gramsci calls the "moving equilibrium" of power cannot be resisted in an absolute, global sense, it can still be challenged by making use of particular strategies aimed at specific situations; in other words, as Hall and Jameson would have it, the diffusion of power necessitates the diffusion of resistance (31). *Engagement* in the postmodern world is possible only if it is accompanied by the abandonment of the utopian ideal: victories are localized, temporary, and incomplete. In Andrew Ross' words, postmodern Left activists must accept that "gains for some cannot be universalized as gains for all" (xix).

It appears, however, that old, idealistic habits die hard even among postmodernists. Chantal Mouffe, for example, expands and modifies the Gramscian concept of specifically focused political activism into what she calls radical democracy, a far-reaching design with familiar utopian overtones:

Radical democracy demands that we acknowledge difference . . . [in] everything that has been excluded by the concept of Man in the abstract. Universalism is not rejected but particularized; what is needed is a new kind of articulation between the universal and the particular. (36)²

² These ideas are explored in greater depth in Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics,

In order to achieve this articulation, Mouffe argues that

it is important to abandon the myth of a transparent society, reconciled with itself, for that kind of fantasy leads to totalitarianism. A project of radical and plural democracy, on the contrary, requires the existence of multiplicity, of plurality, and of conflict, and sees in them the *raison d'être* of politics. (41)

In a similar vein, John McGowan, drawing on the Hegelian notion of *positive* or *situated* freedom (58), argues for what he calls *semiautonomy*, based on the recognition that

in spite of the fears of foundationalist theorists and the premature announcements of absolute freedom by the "God is dead, everything is permissible" types, social order has proved remarkably durable in the absence of fundamental guarantees. (264)

McGowan chides "postmodern theorists, who can cheerfully adopt positions so close to anarchism because the threat of chaos appears remote" (264), and insists that

the existence of a consensual norm is better demonstrated by the interpretation of concrete social activities and the evidence of a daily life fairly immune from (sic) irresolvable conflicts and violence than by the theoretical procedures of transcendental thought. (265)

Despite their somewhat perfunctory acknowledgment of the existence of conflict, there is in the words of both Mouffe and McGowan a tone of wistful optimism which,

co-authored with Ernesto Laclau (London: Verso, 1985). For a provocative critique of the theories of Mouffe and Laclau, see Daniel T. McGee, "Post-Marxism: The Opiate of the Intellectuals." Modern Language Quarterly 58 (1997): 201-25.

together with their rather naïve generosity toward multiplicity and plurality, suggests a failure to comprehend the deadly, desperate grimness of any serious attempt to achieve anything like a purposeful existence in the postmodern world. In order to begin to understand the depth of the conflicts inherent in plurality, along with the often violent, life-and-death nature of these conflicts, it is necessary to turn to Latin America.

The debate over whether to include Latin America in discussions of postmodernity has raged for some time, and is still far from resolved. Scholars opposed to the idea include Octavio Paz on the Right and Nelson Osorio on the Left, both of whom consider postmodernism to be just another foreign import, a *grand récit* at that, and utterly irrelevant to the experiences and concerns of most Latin Americans (see Beverly and Oviedo 2). Neil Larsen makes a similar objection when he claims that postmodern studies constitute "a covertly imperializing practice of forcing Latin America to conform to a foreign model which it had no hand in establishing" (189). Larsen worries that "just continuing to raise the 'issue' of 'Latin America and postmodernism' is already to fall into a clever sort of neocolonizing trap" (189). Enrique Dussel, for his part, argues that postmodernism is inextricably tied to the

Eurocentric concept of modernity upon which it is based, and that as such, despite its claims to demolish binaries and boundaries, postmodernism actually serves to strengthen the old idea of Latin America's essential otherness.

Dussel holds that

modernity is . . . a European phenomenon, but one constituted in a didactic relation with a non-European alterity that is its ultimate content. Modernity appears when Europe affirms itself as the 'center' of a *World History* that it inaugurates; the 'periphery' that surrounds this center is consequently part of its self-definition. (65; emphasis in the original)

According to the above views, then, while postmodernism purports to break down the distinctions between center and periphery, it instead reinforces them in new, more subtle ways, and is thus of no benefit whatsoever to Latin America.

For Juan Poblete, however, the entire argument is moot, since Latin America is a locus of "heterogeneidad posmodernista *avant la lettre*," where

la modernidad se desarrolla a través de una transformación de . . . tradiciones premodernas . . . [y] culmina en una "heterogeneidad multitemporal," ya que lo moderno no desplazó a lo antiguo sino que lo transformó. (123)

[modernity develops through a transformation of premodern conditions, and culminates in "multitemporal heterogeneity," since the modern transformed rather than displaced the old].

Added to this blurring of temporal divisions is a similar blurring, through the process of transculturation, of the traditional boundaries between urban and rural society. In their recent study of Latin American popular culture, William Rowe and Vivian Schelling observe that "[c]ultural movement between city and country has been bidirectional," and warn that "it would be misleading to conceive of urban and rural cultures in a pure state" (65). To accept this observation as valid, they assert, demands a radical reassessment of what have become commonplaces of political and literary interpretations of Latin America:

It is no longer accurate to make sharp or fixed distinctions between rural and urban cultures. . . . To see the city as a corrupting and contaminating force, in opposition to a pure and authentic culture rooted in the rural areas, is to indulge in nostalgia. (97)

According to Françoise Perus, it is likewise imperative to discard the venerable political and literary trope of *civilización y barbarie*. Latin American history, she writes, is not and has never been a straightforward movement away from *barbarie* toward *civilización*, but rather "la conjunción y . . . la disyunción de movimientos de tiempos y espacios diversos y heterogéneos entre sí" [the conjunction and disjunction of temporal and spatial movements that are diverse in themselves]. To these arguments Mary Louise Pratt adds the provocative

observation that, given the complex configuration of social structures in Latin America, the very concept of heterogeneity connotes different things to different people:

Desde el punto de vista del ciudadano la heterogeneidad se percibe como fragmentación . . . de un campo político antes unificado. Pero . . . desde el punto de vista de los no ciudadanos que buscan ciudadanía . . . se trata de una integración de la disolución de estructuras que les negaban plena ciudadanía y agencia social. Es decir, para los no ciudadanos, la fragmentación es el estado anterior. (25; emphasis in the original)

[From the insider's point of view, heterogeneity is perceived as the fragmentation of a once unified political field. But from the point of view of the outsider seeking inclusion, it is seen as the [re]integration of structures that have dissolved and thus denied them inclusion and social power. That is, for outsiders, fragmentation is the *prior state*].

The above interpretations seem to suggest that in Latin America the postmodern condition is not a recent phenomenon, but rather an intensification of the social, spatial, and temporal heterogeneity that has characterized Latin American life at least since the conquest. This being the case, the question of whether to include Latin America in the postmodern debate becomes meaningless; indeed, Latin America might well serve as a model for the illustration of elements of postmodernity that are only

partially realized in other regions, including those of the First World.

Nevertheless, the notion of a postmodern Latin America is a topic of vigorous debate among Latin American scholars from a variety of disciplines, particularly with regard to the impact such a notion might have on different elements of society. For Néstor García Canclini, the postmodern perspective is advantageous in that it effectively counters what he calls *latinoamericanismo*³ or *macondismo*, a kind of fundamentalism which "congela lo 'latinoamericano' como santuario de la naturaleza premoderna y sublime y este continente como el lugar en que la violencia social es hechizada por los afectos" [causes all that is 'Latin American' to be frozen into the role of a sanctuary of sublime, premodern nature, and defines the continent as the place where social violence is conjured by the emotions] (11). Postmodernism, says García Canclini, shifts the focus away from the country and onto the huge, sprawling, unstructured city, "el escenario en que mejor se exhibe la declinación de los metarrelatos históricos, de las utopías que imaginaron un desarrollo humano ascendente y

³ For a lucid discussion of the concept of *latinoamericanismo*, see Enrico Mario Santi, "Latinamericanism and Restitution." Latin American Literary Review 20 (1992): 88-96.

cohesionado a través del tiempo" [the setting in which one can best appreciate the decline of the historical metanarrative, and of the utopian vision of cohesive and ascendant human development throughout time] (17). The postmodern Latin American city, which he compares both to a high-speed videoclip and to Borges' Aleph, cannot be understood or explained, but only experienced: "Para ser un buen lector de la vida urbana hay que plegarse al ritmo y gozar las visiones efímeras." [To be a good reader of urban life one must abandon oneself to its rhythms and delight in its ephemeral visions] (18-19).

In stark contrast to the "euphoric" postmodernism of García Canclini are the misgivings of "dyspeptic" postmodernists such as Norbert Lechner, who worries that "[t]he postmodernist critique of power approximates an anarchist posture with . . . the danger of ending up as a purely testimonial and ineffectual form of rebelliousness" (128). Even more alarming, in Lechner's view, is the idea that this posture undermines its own best intentions and ends up reinforcing the status quo:

Beyond a certain point disenchantment ceases to be a beneficial loss of illusions and is transformed into a dangerous loss of meaning. . . . Apparently radical, this attitude is profoundly conservative: It prefers to adapt itself to the supposedly natural course of the world. (136-37)

Expressing similar concerns about the possibility of postmodern opposition to power, George Yúdice, Jean Franco, and Juan Flores see pluralism as the enemy of effective resistance:

[T]he ideological veneer of pluralism admits difference without the difference constituting a threat to state and market systems. In fact, pluralism has mobilized difference in the service of these systems. (x)

While the postmodern debate continues to grow in scope and intensity, it is by now clear that Latin America not only cannot be excluded from the dialogue, but contributes a unique perspective to it. Because fragmentation, decentralization, and the blurring of boundaries are ubiquitous, easily observable features of everyday social and political life, the Latin American experience emphatically demands that the issues under consideration not be confined to the relatively safe realm of academic discourse, but be treated, at the risk of undermining the entire concept of postmodern detachment, as vitally serious problems requiring urgent attention. Specifically, the question of whether it is possible to be politically, socially, and morally *engagé* in the postmodern world becomes a matter of life and death when regarded in the context of the incipient violence and chaos that

overshadow, in many cases, even the most mundane activities.

This sense of urgency is strikingly expressed, albeit by different means and from different perspectives, in the novels of José María Arguedas and Mario Vargas Llosa, who at first glance appear to have in common little more than their nationality, their literary talent, and the fact that many of the issues they address in their writings are dramatically played out in their personal lives. On closer examination, however, it becomes evident that Arguedas and Vargas Llosa are deeply committed to exploring the same postmodern concerns in the specific context of their national culture. Both are acutely aware of Peru as a locus of extreme cultural heterogeneity, with all its concomitant societal upheaval, and are aware as well of the crucial role of the indigenous population--in itself heterogeneous--in determining the consequences of that upheaval. Instrumental to their efforts to portray Peruvian society in all its postmodern complexity is their shared disdain for traditional *indigenista* fiction and what they consider its utterly false portrayal of the indigenous and non-indigenous people of Peru. Vargas Llosa writes:

Los escritores peruanos descubrieron al indio cuatro siglos después que los conquistadores españoles y su comportamiento con él no fue menos

criminal que el de Pizarro. ("José María Arguedas y el indio" 139)

[Peruvian writers discovered the Indian four centuries after the Spanish *conquistadores*, and their behavior toward him was no less criminal than that of Pizarro].

Indigenista fiction, in his opinion, is inadequate both as social document and as art:

El fracaso del *indigenismo* fue doble: como instrumento de reivindicación del indio, por su racismo al revés y su criterio histórico estrecho, y como movimiento literario, por su mediocridad estética. (142)

[*Indigenismo* was a double failure: as a means of vindicating the Indian, due to its reverse racism and narrow historical perspective; and as a literary movement, due to its aesthetic mediocrity].

In an interview with Chester Christian, Arguedas expresses similar objections to literary *indigenismo*, declaring that "yo decidí escribir por las groserías que en los libros se habían escrito. . . . La población andina estaba completamente mal interpretada" [I decided to write because of the gross errors that had been written in books. The Andean population had been completely misinterpreted] (232). Elsewhere, Arguedas reiterates his rejection of *indigenismo* as a genre, and takes particular offense at the application of the *indigenista* label to his own work, which for him

se trata de novelas en las cuales el Perú andino aparece en todos sus elementos, en su inquietante

y confusa realidad humana, de la cual el indio es tan solo uno de los muchos y distintos personajes. (La novela y el problema de la expresión literaria 53)

[consists of novels in which Andean Peru appears with all its elements, in the unsettling confusion of its human reality, in which the Indian is only one of the many different players].

Both Arguedas and Vargas Llosa undertake the extraordinarily difficult task of simultaneously representing their world artistically and participating in it directly through activities that reveal their shared desire for *engagement*, as well as their vastly different temperaments, political perspectives, and approaches to social issues. For Vargas Llosa, who has long been an active participant in the political life of Peru, politics is a means of establishing order and achieving a balance between "la libertad y la igualdad, dos nobles aspiraciones humanas que, recónditamente, son alérgicas la una a la otra" [liberty and equality, two noble human aspirations that are secretly allergic to one another] ("Los nuevos retos" 207). In addition, public life appears to agree with his gregariousness and polished urbanity, the temperament of the consummate politician, which Alfredo Bryce Echenique describes as "sonriente, jovial y altivo" [smiling, jovial, and aloof] (172). By contrast, the more diffident Arguedas, who for Gordon Brotherston is

characterized "by the great delicacy and lack of animus with which he expresses himself" (102), eschews direct political involvement as an inappropriate activity for a writer whose primary task is to express himself, politically and otherwise, through his art:

[Y]o creo que el artista no debe estar inscrito en ningún partido político porque corre el riesgo de sectarizarse, y entonces mira las cosas desde un ángulo muy determinado. Es preferible mantenerse un poco al margen. (Christian 232)

[I believe that an artist should not be a member of any political party, because he runs the risk of becoming sectarian and thus of seeing things from one particular angle. It is preferable that he remain on the sidelines].

He instead chooses to combine literature and ethnography--that is, art and science--as a means of expressing his deep solidarity with the Indians, of educating the public about them, and of contributing to the reconciliation of some of the cultural contradictions that he fears are tearing his country apart.

In the case of both writers, the attempt to find solutions to social problems and create order from chaos fails utterly, and the failure is instrumental in influencing each of them to carry out a grand, irrevocable gesture of despair. In 1969, after painstakingly documenting in his last novel the disintegration both of his country and his own psyche, Arguedas commits suicide.

In Eduardo Galeano's words, "[s]u historia es la historia del Perú, y enfermo del Perú se mata" [his story is the story of Peru, and sick of Peru (sick with Perú's sickness) he kills himself] (Rovira 3). A generation later, Vargas Llosa, disappointed and embittered at having lost the presidential election to the populist Alberto Fujimori, and alarmed at what he sees as his country's regression to dictatorial rule, emigrates definitively, renounces his nationality, and becomes a citizen of Spain.

A close, comparative reading of representative works by Arguedas and Vargas Llosa reveals the process by which each of the authors engages with the postmodern concerns discussed above and translates them into the specific context of contemporary Peru. In addition, it offers arguments to support the speculation that Arguedas' suicide and Vargas Llosa's self-imposed exile are to a great extent direct results of what they discover in the course of attempting to make sense of their lives and their literary experience. The finality of these drastic gestures indicates that the problems of postmodernity are--quite literally in Arguedas' case--a matter of life and death, and at the same time underscores the elusiveness of any satisfactory answer to the question of how to go about living in the postmodern world.

The second chapter of this study focuses on Arguedas' Los ríos profundos (1958) and Vargas Llosa's La casa verde (1965), each of which serves as a vehicle for presenting the author's views on specific issues related to such broad concerns as racial, temporal, and linguistic heterogeneity, and the process of transculturation. It then argues for a postmodern reading of these issues in the context of contemporary Peruvian society, compares and contrasts the individual interpretations of both Arguedas and Vargas Llosa regarding their nature and significance, and discusses the importance of the ambivalence surrounding the cautiously optimistic conclusions both writers reach about the possibility of future solutions.

The third chapter explores this ambivalence in greater depth, examines the ways in which it is intensified in Arguedas' Todas las sangres (1964) and Vargas Llosa's El hablador (1987), and argues that these two novels demonstrate both a growing awareness of the complexity of the problems existing in postmodern Peru, and an increasing sense of anxiety over their implications. In addition, it attempts to illustrate that both writers resort to denial as a means of warding off the despair that accompanies their contemplation of the postmodern.

The fourth chapter is devoted to Arguedas' posthumous novel El zorro de arriba y el zorro de abajo (1971). It treats the novel as a literary expression of the despair that finally overtakes the author, speculates upon some possible causes that have hitherto gone unexplored, and analyzes Arguedas' failed attempt to invoke political activism as a means of warding off that despair.

The fifth chapter discusses Mario Vargas Llosa's Lituma en los Andes (1993), and attempts to show that this novel, written in exile, offers a surprising, and surprisingly powerful, rebuttal to the notion that the violence pervading Peru is a product of postmodern disorder. It further suggests that this rebuttal is based on Vargas Llosa's vision, still only partially formulated and tentatively expressed, of a deep, dark, and terrible order far more threatening than anything to be found on the postmodern landscape.

The concluding chapter synthesizes the arguments and observations made in the discussion of the six novels, and evaluates the conclusions at which Arguedas and Vargas Llosa arrive regarding the possibility of effective *engagement* in postmodern Peru. It then attempts to relate their conclusions to the larger context of postmodernity in a global sense, speculates on the extent to which Arguedas

and Vargas Llosa contribute to an understanding of the life-and-death matters they address, and hazards an opinion of whether such an understanding opens the way for any effective course of action aimed at the resolution of these matters. Finally, it suggests that, in the case of Vargas Llosa, the confrontation with despair might herald an important philosophical shift, and that future works might include a new dimension--possibly a spiritual one--utterly foreign to postmodern thinking.

CHAPTER TWO

FLIRTING WITH POSTMODERNISM IN LOS RÍOS PROFUNDOS AND LA CASA VERDE

With the exception of El zorro de arriba y el zorro de abajo, Arguedas' novels are seldom mentioned in a postmodern context, while critics who read Vargas Llosa in the light of postmodernism tend to exclude La casa verde from their discussion, and classify it as an essentially modernist text seasoned with a few grains of postmodern skepticism. M. Keith Booker, for example, in Vargas Llosa among the Postmodernists, considers La casa verde a utopian novel that reflects the "political optimism that swept the Latin American Left after the success of the Cuban Revolution" (16). In his view, the novel marks the end of Vargas Llosa's short-lived radical Left period, and signals his transition toward the right-wing views so often associated with postmodern cynicism (52-53).

I suggest, however, that both Los ríos profundos and La casa verde be read in the context of postmodernism, not because they arrive at a firm espousal of postmodern ideas or attitudes, but because they articulate some of the issues at the heart of the postmodern debate, flirt with them, and ultimately retreat from them without abandoning them entirely. More importantly, they open the way for a

fuller consideration of postmodern issues, which both Arguedas and Vargas Llosa undertake in subsequent novels.

Modernists and postmodernists for the most part agree that the present condition is one of disorder, flux, and profound uncertainty, in which the traditional center either has been utterly destroyed or cannot hold for long. They likewise agree that this unsettled and unsettling state of affairs demands the radical questioning of every aspect of existence, including such fundamental concepts as truth, meaning, and reality. Where they diverge is in their assessment of how this situation came about, how it can be expected to develop, and how those caught in its midst should respond to it.

For the modernist, contemporary chaos is a temporary crisis, a necessary component of the transition from an old, outdated system to a new one. In what Booker calls "an attempt to establish a space of order amidst the chaotic confusion of modern civilization" (191), modernism seeks a new center in the form of new points of reference and new manifestations of authority, and strives as well to discover strategies for negotiating the difficult passage from one system to another. While the process is painful and at times disheartening, and while the possibility always exists that the new order will be worse than the

old, the modernist is committed to a utopian vision of the future and thus never abandons hope.

For the postmodernist, however, the notion of a stable center is an illusion, and what passes for order is artificially imposed and extremely fragile. Fredric Jameson, for example, suggests that to imagine a fall from an original condition of order is to indulge in fantasy. In his words, "the 'fall', or dissociation, is always there already" (339). Even the more cautious Mikhail Bakhtin, according to Gary Morson and Caryl Emerson, contends that "[o]rder needs justification, disorder does not. The natural state of things is *mess*" (30; emphasis in the original). Chaos is the norm, and attempts to transform or overcome it are fleeting, usually repressive, and ultimately futile. Trapped in a universe that appears to have only panic and emptiness at its core, the postmodernist must choose from among the alternatives of enduring the situation with resignation, embracing it with enthusiasm, or succumbing to cynicism and despair.

Both Arguedas' Los ríos profundos and Vargas Llosa's La casa verde address the question of the lost or deteriorating center, and embark on the ostensibly modernist project of recuperating it or finding a worthy substitute for it. While both novels appear to succeed in

presenting at least the possibility of a solution to the postmodern dilemma, there is evidence to suggest that the proposed solutions undermine themselves, casting doubts on the validity of the notion of a center, and allowing a discordant note of postmodern disenchantment to spoil what at first appears to be the hope of recapturing the vision of a harmonious universe.

* * * * *

Ernesto, the narrator-protagonist of Los ríos profundos, exhibits a tenacious faith in just such a notion of fundamental harmony, a faith that persists despite repeated challenges. In Cornejo Polar's words, Ernesto has

una concepción del universo entendido como totalidad coherente, compacta, absolutamente integrada. El contraste entre esta concepción y la realidad de un mundo desintegrado y conflictivo es el núcleo de la novela. (100)

[a conception of the universe understood as a coherent, compact, absolutely integrated totality. The contrast between this conception and the reality of a fragmented and conflictive world is the nucleus of the novel].

With an urgency that points to an increasing sense of desperation, Ernesto takes hold of and subsequently discards a succession of centers, none of which possesses the solidity and permanence he seeks.

His mother, the first center of Ernesto's universe, has literally disappeared, and his repeated attempts to

replace her with other women invariably fail. In stark contrast to this idealized maternal image is Ernesto's father Gabriel, a loving, well-intentioned man whom Ernesto reveres, but who nevertheless has some grave flaws and weaknesses that do not escape the notice of his son. When he arrives in Cuzco, apparently attempting to evade unidentified enemies, it seems to Ernesto that his father "iba escondiéndose junto a las paredes, en la sombra. El Cuzco era su ciudad nativa y no quería que lo reconocieran" [He walked along, hugging the walls and concealing himself in the shadows. Cuzco was his birthplace, and he didn't want to be recognized] (Los ríos profundos 8).¹ This travesty of a grand entrance diminishes Gabriel in Ernesto's eyes, and bears an uncomfortable resemblance to the initial appearance of the novel's most degraded character, the opa Marcelina: "De noche, cuando iba al campo de recreo, caminaba rozando las paredes silenciosamente." [At night, when she went to the courtyard, she would walk silently, rubbing against the walls] (54).

By turns diffident and outspoken, lethargic and bursting with grandiose plans that never materialize,

¹ Subsequent references to this work will be made by page number or, for purposes of clarification, by the initials RP.

Gabriel betrays an ambivalence that can be attributed to his status as a white man caught between the white and Indian worlds without belonging to either, and more particularly by what Ariel Dorfman sees as his unwillingness to accept or even acknowledge that status:

Prisionero de su propia marginalidad e insignificancia . . . su existencia es ineludiblemente peregrina y errante. . . . Se ilusiona con instalarse y ser independiente, términos contradictorios en una sociedad rígida. ("Padres y puentes" 94)

[A prisoner of his own marginality and insignificance, his existence is unavoidably that of a pilgrim and a wanderer. He dreams both of becoming established and of being independent, contradictory terms in a rigid society].

More unsettling for Ernesto is his father's ambivalence toward the Indians among whom he lives and works, but toward whom he maintains a distant relationship that in Ernesto's eyes indicates a lack of sympathy for their situation. In Cuzco, the stones do not speak to Gabriel as they do to the boy (12), the Incas are dead (13), and the degradation of the servants of El Viejo appears to go unnoticed. Similarly, Gabriel's interest in indigenous music is that of an observer rather than a participant, as he cannot sing and is a clumsy dancer (30). This cool ambivalence on the part of Gabriel recalls a remark Arguedas made about his own father, in an interview with Sara Castro Klarén: "Yo no entendí nunca el mundo de mi

padre. . . . Mi padre sentía simpatía por los indios pero formalmente los trataba mal. [I never understood my father's world. My father felt sympathy for the Indians, but treated them badly] ("Testimonio" 47).

Gabriel's greatest failing, however, is his propensity to lie to Ernesto about matters to which he attaches little weight, but which matter greatly to Ernesto. Gabriel promises Ernesto that they will find happiness in Cuzco (18), and states just as unequivocally that "[l]a armonía de Dios existe en la tierra" [God's harmony exists on earth] (15). Just as unthinkingly, he leaves Ernesto in the stifling atmosphere of Abancay, in the care of an utterly ineffectual guardian, to receive his education in a school he knows to be a training ground for oppressors (Dorfman, "Padres y puentes" 94). Furthermore, he lacks the courage to tell his son that he is leaving Abancay because of his desperate financial situation, and instead tries to deceive Ernesto with empty promises and "[l]os planes deslumbrantes de siempre" [the same old dazzling plans] (44). However, despite Gabriel's weaknesses, Ernesto clings to the image of his father as a stable center, even as he becomes increasingly aware that the center cannot hold.

Faced with the void left by an absent mother and an unreliable father, Ernesto looks to the indigenous

community that nurtured him as a child, and which in his imagination and memory possesses the qualities of a perfectly balanced amalgam of both parents: "Los jefes de la familia, y las señoras *mamakunas* de la comunidad, me protegieron y me infundieron la impagable ternura en que vivo" [the men who headed the households, and the matrons of the community, protected me and instilled a tenderness that still lives in me, and that I can never repay] (48).

For the most part, however, the Indians Ernesto encounters in Cuzco and Abancay have been degraded almost to the point of losing their humanity. The *pongo* of El Viejo, mute and terrified, "se inclinó como un gusano que pidiera ser aplastado" [groveled like a worm asking to be crushed] (18), and Ernesto marvels at "el esfuerzo que hacía por apenas parecer vivo" [the effort it cost him to look as if he were barely alive] (22). Similarly, the *colonos* of Patibamba, if possible even more oppressed than the *pongo*, appear to have come close to forfeiting their last link with humanity, the use of language. When Ernesto greets the women in their native Quechua tongue, he observes their reaction in horror and disbelief:

[L]as mujeres me miraban atemorizadas y con desconfianza. Ya no escuchaban ni el lenguaje de los ayllus; les habían hecho perder la memoria; porque yo les hablaba con las palabras y el tono de los comuneros, y me desconocieron. (47)

[The women looked at me with fear and suspicion. They no longer recognized the language of their people; their memory had been taken away from them; because I spoke to them in the words and tone of the villagers, and they looked at me as if I were a stranger].

In the case of both the *pongo* and the *colonos*, the first and almost the only word they utter is the Quechua negative *manan*, which for Dorfman constitutes a negation of their entire existence ("Padres y puentes" 93), and which dashes Ernesto's hopes of finding a nucleus of affirmation among them, at least until he hears the same word spoken again later in a different tone and context. For the present, however, Ernesto clings to his vision of a nurturing indigenous community much as he clings to his image of a nurturing father; as a product of his memory and imagination, fueled by desire, which persists in spite of the evidence provided by experience because to abandon it would be to die.

Just as Ernesto searches for a benevolent center to his universe, so does he search for a core of absolute evil that can provide a coherent explanation for the suffering around and within him. He at first appears to find it in El Viejo, whom Dorfman describes as a burlesque of Jehovah, who presides over an "anti-Edén" complete with a dying tree at its center, and who takes pleasure in rebuffing those who, like Ernesto's father, come to him seeking "el . . .

cumplimiento de alguna innominada promesa" [the fulfillment of some unnamed promise] ("Padres y puentes" 92).

Once he is in Abancay, however, Ernesto sees the center of evil as the interior courtyard of the school, where the *opa* Marcelina is violated, where scenes of violence and cruelty are enacted on a regular basis, and where "[l]os niños . . . reproducen, llevándolos a un extremo, los peores vicios del sistema" [the boys reproduce and take to extremes the worst vices of the system] (Dorfman, "Padres y puentes" 103). The courtyard is, as Giuseppe Bellini and others have suggested, the innermost circle of a hell that encompasses Abancay, the surrounding hacienda, and by extension all of Peru. Cornejo Polar is of the opinion that at the absolute center is Marcelina, who for him represents pure evil (116); however, I maintain that on the contrary, she personifies, if not pure innocence, then the defenselessness of the victim without whom evil cannot exist.

In Ernesto's eyes, a more likely candidate for the personification of evil within the hell of the school is Lleras, whose origins are vaguely sinister, who delights in gratuitously tormenting younger, weaker boys, and who succeeds in sowing discord among those of his victims who might otherwise band together to challenge him. In

addition, in Lleras' relationship with Añuco, and with the priests who protect him, there is a suggestion of homosexuality (56), which, as Vargas Llosa has pointed out, is for Arguedas a sure sign of villainy (La utopía arcaica 270, 318). Surrounding everything is the more diffuse but no less oppressive systemic evil represented by the Church, the military, and the *gamonales* of the surrounding hacienda, all of whom control the populace through manipulation, intimidation, coercion, and outright terror.

Confused by what he sees as a panorama of conflicting absolutes, Ernesto sets out to find a new center that will reconcile contradictions and provide a stable basis from which to begin to understand the world. He at first imagines this stability to have a feminine form, based on his memory of the fair-skinned, blue-eyed girl he glimpsed in the village of Saisa, and who represents for him the ideal woman to be worshiped from afar but never approached:

Consideré siempre a las señoritas como seres
lejanos. . . . Las temía, huía de ellas. . . .
No eran de mi mundo. Centelleaban en otro cielo.
(82)

[I always considered the young women to be
distant beings. I feared them and fled from
them. They were not of my world. They sparkled
in another heaven].

Real women of flesh and blood, by the very fact of their approachability, fall short of Ernesto's ideal. The

mysterious woman who feeds and comforts him after the *chichera* rebellion is fair and blue-eyed to be sure, but fat and motherly rather than ethereally erotic like the tall, slim girl from Saisa (68). In like manner, while he is physically attracted to the schoolgirl Alcira, he finds her ordinary features displeasing, and compares her to his ideal with a note of cruelty out of keeping with his gentle nature:

No se podía estar cerca de Alcira, con el recuerdo de la niña de Saisa. Las pantorillas y lo ancho de su cuerpo irritaban. Había que irse. (179)

[I couldn't be around Alcira when I had the memory of the girl from Saisa. Her [thick] calves and stocky figure were irritating. I had to leave].

Ironically, the two women who ultimately have the greatest importance for Ernesto are utterly foreign to his ideal. The hideous *opa* Marcelina at first inspires in him only pity and disgust, along with a kind of horrified fascination. However, when he sees her in the bell tower of the church, holding Felipa's shawl and gleefully laughing at the people below, his feelings are transformed into admiration for her and contempt for his own role in her dehumanization:

Reía fuerte, en cortos desahogos. . . . Se festejaba a plenitud. . . . Pero su risa [repercutía] en mí con atroz tristeza . . . por los recuerdos de haberla visto desnuda, con el

traje sobre la cabeza, blanca, disputada en ciega
pelea por los internos. (206-07)

[She laughed loudly, in short gulps. She was
enjoying herself completely. But her laughter
echoed inside me with a dreadful sadness because
I remembered having seen her naked, with her
dress over her head, pale, the object of dispute
in the schoolboys' blind battles].

Marcelina's death, however, appears to bring Ernesto a
measure of respite from his guilt, as he imagines that she
has been transformed: "Le pedí perdon en nombre de todos
los alumnos . . . [y] el rostro de ella embellecía, perdía
su deformidad." [I asked her forgiveness on behalf of all
the students, and her face became beautiful and lost its
deformity] (229). Imagining them both redeemed, he
thereafter refers to her with the honorific term of address
doña.

An even more powerful feminine figure, and one even
further removed from Ernesto's ideal, is *doña Felipa*, the
mestiza leader of the *chichera* rebellion. Robust,
pockmarked, with coarse features and an imposing voice, she
inspires Ernesto with her words, beginning with *manan*
(102), which on her lips is an expression of defiance
rather than defeat. She thus succeeds in fascinating him
despite the fact that she is the antithesis of the fragile
young girl from Saisa. In his recent book on Arguedas,
Mario Vargas Llosa points out that Felipa and her *chichera*

sisters are the first and almost the only of Arguedas' female characters not marked by passivity and submissiveness:

Las vemos coqueteando con gracia y picardía . . . y tomando iniciativas audaces, de las que son incapaces los hombres. . . . Pero es sobre todo en la rebelión por el aparto de la sal, de perfil exclusivamente femenino, donde apreciamos el valor de las mujeres. . . . Esta actitud ejecutiva y anticonformista de las mestizas de Abancay contrasta con la pasividad resignada de las indias de Patibamba, a las que aquellas cholas tienen que imponer casi a la fuerza que reciban la sal. (La utopía arcaica 191)

[We see them flirting with grace and spirit, and taking the initiative audaciously, something the men are incapable of doing. But it is above all the rebellion over the distribution of salt, an exclusively feminine undertaking, that allows us to appreciate the courage of the women. This assertive, non-conformist attitude of the Abancay *mestizas* contrasts with the resigned passivity of the Indian women of Patibamba, who have to be all but forced to accept the salt].

While it might appear that an imposing figure like doña Felipa would intimidate the hypersensitive Ernesto, she does no such thing. On the contrary, when she disappears from Abancay in the aftermath of the uprising, she takes on mythical proportions in his imagination, and becomes for him a kind of personal guardian:

Tú eres como el río señora. . . . No te alcanzarán. . . . Y volverás. Miraré tu rostro, que es poderoso como el sol de mediodía. (168)

[You're like the river, Señora. They won't be able to catch you. And you'll come back. I'll

look into your face, as powerful as the noonday sun].

While all the images, sensations, and experiences that assail Ernesto serve to enrich his world, they do nothing to make it comprehensible, and he is no closer to discovering a solid foundation on which to base his existence than he was when he started his quest. Consequently, he looks for a center elsewhere, in the attributes of music and of the *zumbayllu*.

For Ernesto, music has the power to communicate thoughts and feelings that would otherwise be inexpressible. He uses it to pay homage to the girl from Saisa, the *chicheras* use it to defy and ridicule the soldiers, and the master harpist Oblitas uses it to explore the range and depth of human emotions, causing Ernesto to feel energized and almost reborn:

Con una música de éstas puede el hombre llorar hasta consumirse, hasta desaparecer, pero podría igualmente luchar contra una legión de cóndores y de leones. . . . Yo me sentía mejor dispuesto a luchar contra el demonio mientras escuchaba este canto. (189)

[Music like this can make a man cry himself into oblivion, until he disappears, but it might also give him the strength to fight against a legion of condors and lions. As I listened to the music, I felt as if I could fight the devil].

At the same time that it provides inspiration to fight the enemy, however, music reconciles differences and mediates

between adversaries. For Arguedas, the popular *huayno* is one of a very few examples of a harmonious blending of European and indigenous elements. In La utopía arcaica Vargas Llosa calls attention to this point by citing the sociologist Uriel García, who in his 1930 work El nuevo indio refers to the music-laden atmosphere of the *chicherías* as instrumental in the formation of the Peruvian nation. Vargas Llosa writes:

Allí el hombre se despoja de disfraces convencionales y se muestra en su espontaneidad primitiva, en su libertad originaria. Entre esas paredes . . . se codean razas y clases y se emancipa el instinto. . . . Allí se amestizan los instrumentos europeos--el violín, el arpa, el pífano--tocando el *huayno*. La *chichería* es el "invernadero de la cultura." (80)

[There, men rid themselves of their conventional disguises and appear in their primitive spontaneity, in their original freedom. Within those walls different races and classes rub shoulders, and instincts are set free. European instruments--the violin, the harp, the fife--become *mestizos* when they play the *huayno*. The *chichería* is the "greenhouse of culture"].

The extent of the conciliatory power of music is illustrated when the occupying military regiment, hated and feared by the people of Abancay, suddenly becomes humanized, even magical, in the form of a marching band made up of instruments never before seen or heard by most of the townspeople. Ernesto is transported by the experience:

Cantaban con voz de seres humanos. . . .
Sostenían un tono, largamente, con dulzura; la
voz grave inundaba mi alma. . . . [T]odo estaba
encantado por la banda del regimiento, por la
armonía impuesta a tantos instrumentos
misteriosos. (176-77)

[They sang with a human voice. The long, sweet,
sustained tone inundated my soul. Everything was
bewitched by the regimental band, by the harmony
that came from those mysterious instruments].

Similar regenerative and conciliatory qualities are
found in the *zumbayllu*, the singing top that is a universal
toy, and whose name is a harmonious blend of Spanish and
Quechua words. For Ernesto it provides relief from an
otherwise intolerable situation, and serves to neutralize
the power of his enemies:

Encordelé mi hermoso *zumbayllu* y lo hice
bailar. . . . Una gran felicidad, fresca y pura,
iluminó mi vida. . . . ¡Nadie es mi enemigo!
¡Nadie, nadie! (97)

[I wound up my beautiful *zumbayllu* and made it
dance. A great happiness, fresh and pure,
illuminated my life. No one is my enemy! No
one!].

In addition, the singing top evokes the past that Ernesto
longs for and has been trying to recapture:

El canto del *zumbayllu* se internaba en el oído,
avivaba en la memoria la imagen de los ríos, de
los árboles negros que cuelgan en las paredes de
los abismos. (77)

[The song of the *zumbayllu* seeped into my ear,
awakening in my memory the image of rivers, and
of black trees clinging to the walls of cliffs].

In Renaud Richard's words, the *zumbayllu* "resuscita el tiempo perdido, y borra el miedo angustioso al porvenir" [resuscitates lost time, and wipes away the anguished fear of the future] (183). In addition, in Ernesto's mind the *zumbayllu* is a link with his father, and he imbues it with the power to carry messages to him across great distances in order to persuade him to return to Abancay. Even the more intransigent of the students are not immune to the *zumbayllu's* power. Lleras' sycophant Añuco ignores his protector while the top is spinning (78), and the usually disdainful Valle asks Ernesto to make it dance, and condescends to call it "un precioso instrumento" [a precious instrument] (146).

In the power of the *zumbayllu* and of music, however, there is a fragility that calls into question their ability to provide the stability of a center, and leads once again to the question of whether the notion of a center is after all an illusion, and the search for it a futile enterprise. Two characters who disrupt the search and make light of its objective add to the uncertainty of an already precarious situation.

The first is the self-important dandy Valle, a caricature of the cynic who believes in nothing and disdains those who do: "Su ateísmo era famoso, y su

'materialismo'. . . . Adoraba sólo la forma; desdeñaba a los románticos y 'pasionistas'." [His atheism was famous, as was his "materialism." He only worshiped form, and was contemptuous of romantics and "passionists"] (88). While Valle is an insufferable snob, he at one point expresses thoughts that are uncomfortably close to the unspoken misgivings of Ernesto, and by implication of Arguedas, regarding the future of the indigenous people of Peru. Upon learning that an entire regiment has been called to put down the *chichera* rebellion because of popular rumors about the *mestiza* women's superior strength, Valle scoffs: "¡El mito de la raza! Las cholos mueren igual que los indios si las ametrallan. . . . ¡Que se maten hasta el fin de los siglos! Yo soy un espectador infausto." [The myth of the race! The *mestizas* will die the same as Indians if they are machine-gunned. Let them all kill each other until the end of time! I'm just a miserable spectator] (147-48). Beneath the scorn of Valle's words is a note of despair that is not lost on Ernesto, precisely because it recalls some of his own doubts and fears, and reminds him of the increasing effort he must put forth to suppress them.

Gerardo, the son of the commander of the regiment that occupies Abancay following the *chichera* uprising, presents

a different sort of challenge to Ernesto's world view. Despite the prestige he enjoys due to his father's rank and to his status as a cosmopolitan *costeño*, he is relaxed and affable, "[un] muchacho feliz y fuerte" [a strong and happy lad] (219), universally admired not only for his unaffected good humor and natural athletic ability, but for his unabashedly cavalier treatment of women that the other boys try to imitate. While his behavior offends Ernesto deeply, he cannot wholly dislike Gerardo, and his disapproval is tinged with envy.

Although Valle and Gerardo are relatively minor characters who affect Ernesto only indirectly, in combination they drive a wedge into the monolithic universe he has up until now defended so fiercely. They represent, in a sense, versions of Raymond Williams' "dyspeptic" and "euphoric" postmodernists; the one an amusedly cynical "infausto espectador," the other given over to an unreflective enjoyment of the carnival, and both possibly better equipped to survive in a centerless world than those like Ernesto who stubbornly hold on to the illusion of order and harmony.

Increasingly, however, Ernesto is forced to acknowledge inconsistencies and ambiguities in the icons he has chosen to represent his notion of a center. The

conciliatory effects of music and the *zumbayllu*, for example, prove to be transitory, offering nothing of substance, but only a promise that may turn out to be empty. In Cornejo Polar's words: "La presencia del trompo no modifica básicamente la situación . . . pero ofrece un elemento que hasta cierto punto hace habitable el espacio terrible." [The presence of the spinning top does not basically modify the situation, but offers an element that, up to a certain point, makes the terrible space livable] (125). Even the etymology of the Quechua suffix of the word *zumbayllu* connotes evanescence rather than permanence: "la luz no solar . . . la luz menor: el claror, el relámpago, el rayo, toda luz vibrante" [light from a source other than the sun, lesser light: reflected light, a flash of lightning, all trembling light] (RP 75). Most unsettling of all are indications that the comforting messages of the music and the *zumbayllu* might be misleading or totally false. After the *chichera* rebellion, when rumors of reprisals start to filter through Abancay, Ernesto turns to the *zumbayllu* for comfort and guidance:

El trompo . . . cantó agudamente; el zumbido fue haciéndose más intenso, penetraba en el oído como un llamado que brotara de la propia sangre del oyente.

--«¡No habrá escarmiento! ¡No habrá escarmiento!» (128)

[The top sang shrilly; the humming grew more intense and penetrated the ear like a call that had sprung from the hearer's own blood. "There will be no reprisals! There will be no reprisals!"]

The following day, he and the other boys listen as one of their companions plays the flute, and Ernesto says of the experience, "nosotros sentíamos que a través de la música el mundo se nos acercaba de nuevo, otra vez feliz" [we felt that through the music the world had come back to us and was happy again] (139). The irony is, of course, that these messages are transmitted just as the troops converge on the town and the brutal reprisals begin.

The realization that manifestations of evil are just as ambiguous and inconsistent as those of good intensifies the uncertainty that consumes Ernesto. El Viejo inspires ridicule as well as fear, and Ernesto silently laughs at the old man's short stature and threadbare coat (21-23). Father Linares, who for Ernesto "[t]iene . . . el infierno en los ojos" [has hell in his eyes] (230), at the same time genuinely cares for the boy, and is the only one to offer him protection during the typhus epidemic. When he realizes that he has been spared from the fever, Ernesto is convinced that "[e]l padre me ha salvado. Tiene suciedad, como los otros, en su alma, pero me ha defendido. ¡Dios lo guarde!" [Father Linares has saved me. His soul is filthy

like the others, but he has defended me. God keep him!]
(232). In his dreams, Ernesto associates the priest both with the devil and with his childhood guardian Pablo Maywa, "el indio que más quise" [the Indian I loved best] (50), thus further weakening the case for an interpretation of the world in which good and evil can easily be identified. Even more problematic are the soldiers, symbols of terror and repression, whom Ernesto quickly discovers to be "como yo, no más" [just like me] (212); adolescent boys, for the most part Indians, who, in Cornejo Polar's words

están sometidos a un trágico proceso alienador. Sin dejar de ser indios asumen artificialmente valores y maneras de los oficiales. . . . [D]esgajados de su mundo, [se encuentran] obligados a ser enemigos de los suyos. (144-45)

[are forced to undergo a tragic process of alienation. Although they are Indians, they artificially assume the values and manners of the officers. Torn from their world, they are obliged to become enemies of their own people].

However, the most serious challenge to the notion of an ordered world governed by absolute values comes from the failure of the novel's two ambitious modernist projects: the vindication of the Indian, and Ernesto's personal liberation.

When the initial triumph of the *chichera* rebellion wears off, it becomes clear that the situation of the Indians of Patibamba has not changed, while that of the

mestizos of Abancay has grown worse. Furthermore, the gatekeeper's confusion of the events with a similar uprising and subsequent suppression in 1910 offers a subtle hint about the futility of all such efforts that in the end are indistinguishable from one another.² Though doña Felipa's disappearance and mythification inspire the *colonos* to act, there is a painful irony in the thought that the motive of their revolt--their demand that Father Linares say a mass to ward off the plague--emphasizes their blind faith in the power of their priest, the same priest who is largely responsible for their oppressed state. It should be noted that in Ángel Rama's opinion, the quasi-revolutionary flavor of the ending of Los ríos profundos is an artistic flaw that diminishes the overall power of the novel and allows it to fall into the conventional *indigenista* trap (12). Be that as it may, it is possible that Arguedas himself experienced doubts about the optimistic finale, as he tempers Ernesto's lyrical projections for the future with the conditional mood and expressions of uncertainty:

Quizá el grito [de los indios] alcanzaría a la
madre de la fiebre y la penetraría, haciéndola
estallar, convirtiéndola en polvo

² The irony is increased by the fact that 1910 marked the beginning of yet another failed effort, the Mexican Revolution.

inofensivo. . . . Quizá. . . . Si los
colonos . . . habían aniquilado a la fiebre,
quizá . . . la vería pasar arrastrada por la
corriente. (253-54)

[Perhaps the Indians' cry would reach the mother
of the fever and penetrate her, making her
explode and turning her into harmless dust.
Perhaps. If the *colonos* were to annihilate the
fever, perhaps I'd see it pass by, swept away by
the current].

Ernesto's own salvation is equally tentative, as it is
linked not only to doña Felipa's fate, but to that of the
opa Marcelina as well. Ernesto attaches great importance
to Marcelina's suffering and death, interpreting them as
redemptive and purifying, and as an integral part of his
own journey to liberation. The cook, however, appears to
find no such transcendental meaning in the *opa*'s
predicament. When she remarks bluntly: "¡Es gente! ¿Por
qué no va a sufrir?" [She's a human being! Why wouldn't she
suffer?] (205), she seems to suggest that the horror of
Marcelina's existence is after all quite ordinary, simply
part of the injustice of the human condition. She
immediately amends her statement by declaring that God sent
Marcelina to earth to suffer, thus testifying to a purpose
and meaning after all; however, this contradiction only
adds to the sense of confusion and uncertainty surrounding
what may--or may not--be a significant event.

Ernesto is convinced that he cannot achieve autonomy until he is free of Abancay and reunited with his father, and by the end of the novel he has accomplished the former and is en route to achieving the latter. However, ambivalent elements have insinuated themselves into his project, calling into question both the worthiness of his goals and his chances of reaching them.

Ernesto returns to the school to discover that, hate it though he does, it is the closest thing to a home that he has ever known or is likely ever to know: "Por primera vez me sentí protegido por los muros del colegio, comprendí lo que era la sombra del hogar." [For the first time I felt protected by the walls of the school, and understood what the shadow of a home was] (204). That moment marks the beginning of a slight but noticeable dampening of Ernesto's enthusiasm for his project. He still imagines that his father has come to rescue him, but now calls his dream a "fantástica esperanza" [fantastic hope] (207). He refers to the projected reunion distantly, as an article of faith that is maintained more from custom than conviction, as for example when he anticipates his arrival "a cualquier de los dos cielos: mi padre o el que dicen que espera en la otra vida a los que han sufrido" [in either of the two heavens, my father or the one they say is waiting in the next life

for those who have suffered] (238). Thus, when his father commits the ultimate act of betrayal by ordering him to return to El Viejo until the epidemic subsides, Ernesto's shock and disappointment are not as violent as they might have been had he not already begun to disengage himself from an ideal he knows to be flawed.

The novel closes with a disturbing dual image of the plague and of Lleras, that directly contradicts Ernesto's optimism and makes his declarations of freedom ring false. Both have left Abancay, presumably never to return, but the presumption is naïve when applied to forces that, while perhaps too nebulous and banal to merit the designation *evil*, are nevertheless ubiquitous and profoundly unsettling in their ability to disrupt even the most elaborately articulated project. If one recalls Stuart Hall's reference, in the context of postmodernity, to "[t]he dispersal of what used to be called 'the enemy' into a whole system" and the consequent difficulty of combating it effectively (31), it is indeed possible to see postmodern implications in the fact that at the end of Los ríos profundos the vaguely threatening, seemingly untouchable Lleras is, and may well have, the last word.

* * * * *

Critics who agree that there is a postmodern flavor to Mario Vargas Llosa's later works are of different minds when it comes to his early novel La casa verde, and seem to have difficulty finding a place for it in either the modernist or postmodernist camp. In M. Keith Booker's view, for example, La casa verde marks the end of Vargas Llosa's brief modernist period, and the novel's harsh critique of social institutions such as the church and the military is made "in the hope of promoting the overthrow of those structures and the institution of radical social and political reform" (29). Charles Rossman appears to second this idea when he writes that La casa verde is an example of "literature [that] exposes human evil and social imperfections to enable their improvement" (263), although in the same essay he contradicts his own assertions and makes a strong case for the novel as a cynically postmodern text. Michael Moody, on the other hand, finds no hint of a utopian spirit in La casa verde, and instead takes Vargas Llosa at his word when the author says that his novel depicts a reality that is "una equivocación colectiva monstruosa" [a monstrous collective mistake] (13). I consider both views to be partially correct in the sense that modernist and postmodernist elements coexist in La casa verde just as they do in Los ríos profundos, and that

it is the competition between them for supremacy that helps to create and sustain the high level of tension that characterizes the work.

One of the conflictive elements that contributes to the tension revolves around the search for a center. In La historia secreta de una novela, his account of the genesis of La casa verde, Vargas Llosa recounts that he had originally intended to write two separate novels, one about the coastal region of Piura, and the other about the Amazon jungle, but that he was unable to keep the two worlds apart:

Los piuranos invadían Santa María de Nieva, los selváticos pugnaban también por deslizarse en "la casa verde." Cada vez era más arduo sujetar a cada cual en su mundo respectivo. . . . Al fin sobrevino una especie de caos . . . en el que no era fácil saber dónde . . . terminaba un mundo y dónde empezaba el otro. (52)

[The inhabitants of Piura invaded Santa María de Nieva, the jungle dwellers fought to slip into "the green house." It became harder and harder to keep them all in their respective worlds. Finally, a kind of chaos took over, in which it wasn't easy to know where one world ended and the other began].

Throughout the novel different sites emerge as possible centers, but are abandoned when they prove to be inadequate or illusory.

The obvious candidate for such a base is the Green House itself, the irresistibly inviting monolith that seems

to grow of its own accord out of the desert, becomes the center for the enjoyment of the fundamental human activities of eating, drinking, dancing, and sex, and draws both local residents and outsiders into its core. At the same time, however, it is, as a house of prostitution, a simulacrum where nothing is real, where cosmetics create the illusion of feminine beauty, and where the *habitantas* simulate sexual desire and pleasure in exchange for money. The structure itself is highly unstable as well: it appears, disappears, and reappears in a different form, so that the young people are no longer sure the original Green House ever existed, and even its creator Anselmo "se hacía el perplejo, el misterioso, el desentendido, no sé nada, tengo que irme, de qué me hablan, cuál Casa Verde" [acted perplexed, mysterious, ignorant, I don't know anything, I have to go now, what are you talking about, what Green House] (La casa verde 290).³

The shantytown known as La Mangachería has some of the same attributes as the Green House, but appears to be more stable. By far the most vital quarter of Piura, it provides a haven for the marginalized:

³ Subsequent references to this work will be made by page number or, for purposes of clarification, by the initials CV.

Las puertas . . . están abiertas para los indios que emigran de la sierra y llegan a la ciudad hambrientos y atemorizados, para los brujos expulsados de las aldeas por los curas, para los mercaderes de baratijas que vienen a tentar fortuna en Piura. (34)

[The doors are open to Indians who have come down from the mountains and arrive in the city hungry and frightened, to the sorcerers who have been banished from their villages by the priests, to the hawkers of trinkets who have come to try their luck in Piura].

Integral to La Mangachería are the *chicherías*, which, as has been indicated earlier, can be seen as another kind of greenhouse in which "se manifiesta la fusión cultural de elementos disímiles y se anuncia la nueva identidad peruana" [the cultural fusion of dissimilar elements takes place, and the new Peruvian identity emerges] (Vargas Llosa, La utopía arcaica 80). For Julie Jones, the sense of community to be found in La Mangachería "serves as a positive counterpoint" to the sense of failure and dislocation in the lives of the characters (78), and injects into the otherwise bleak landscape "a feeling of harmony between man and man, man and his environment" (83). The sensation of harmony and permanence is only an illusion, however, for not only is La Mangachería the scene of the worst kind of violence, but by the end of the novel bulldozers have begun to invade the adjoining quarter, and

it is clear that before long La Mangachería will disappear entirely.

Far from the city, Fushía attempts to create an Edenic space on his island, with himself at its center and with Lalita as his consort. While he feels nostalgia for the island after he leaves it, and comes to regard it as the only home he has ever known (364), it is in reality a kind of anti-Eden where the powerful exploit the weak, where mutual treachery undermines every effort to create a stable, orderly environment, and which is eventually abandoned and left to deteriorate.

Surrounding and enveloping everything is that other green house, the jungle, which can be considered central in that everyone sooner or later gravitates to it, and once there, can never completely escape. However, it can also be seen as the antithesis of stability; an intangible entity with circumference everywhere and center nowhere; volatile, unpredictable, and utterly incomprehensible. For Aquilino, "la Amazonía es como mujer caliente, no se está quieta. Aquí todo se mueve, los ríos, los animales, los árboles. Vaya tierra loca la que nos ha tocado" [the Amazon jungle is like a hot woman; it's never still. Everything moves here, the rivers, the animals, the trees. What a crazy land we've ended up in] (51).

Lacking a stable foundation from which to construct their lives, some of the characters undertake utopian projects intended to extract a comprehensible nucleus of order from the surrounding chaos. Regardless of their content, scope, or degree of complexity, every one of these projects, without exception, ends in disaster.

The "civilizing mission" of the well-intentioned Spanish nuns, for example, succeeds in alienating the Indian girls from their culture without adequately preparing them to survive in the white world, and as a result makes them easy targets for exploitation. Similarly, the teachers from Lima who attempt to empower the Indians by helping them form a cooperative, inadvertently set into motion a series of events that culminates in unimaginable horror and suffering for the very people they intend to protect. Less benevolent but equally unsuccessful is Fushía's scheme to get rich and establish an autonomous island empire, and at the end of his life his physical pain is exacerbated by the bitterness of his realization that "[t]odos mis planes me han salido al revés" [all my plans have turned upside down] (95). That even more modest, less well-articulated projects are destined to fail as well is demonstrated by what becomes of

the commonplace dreams of Lalita and Nieves, or of Bonifacia and Lituma, to form a home and family.

Additional indicators of a centerless universe are the breakdown of traditional distinctions between good and evil, and the presence of a high degree of ambivalence in individuals, groups, and value systems. The otherwise contemptible Fushía reveals uncharacteristic tenderness in his regard for Aquilino, and for the Shapra girl he takes as his mistress, while the novel's other villain, Julio Reátegui, twice shows compassion for Bonifacia; first, when he saves her from being raped, and second, when he heeds her pleas to stay at the mission rather than accompany him to Iquitos to work as a domestic servant. Likewise, sympathetic characters are capable of great cruelty to those they love most: Anselmo takes advantage of his adored Antonia's helplessness and indirectly causes her death, while Lituma mistreats and exploits Bonifacia despite the fact that he loves her.

In contrast to the portrayal of Peruvian society in Los ríos profundos, in La casa verde there is little basis for a moral distinction between the white and Indian worlds; that is, there is no significant difference between *civilización* and *barbarie*. Both groups are equally barbaric, and represent "un mundo terrible" [a terrible

world] (Rodríguez Monegal 53) in which the common denominator is "la constante explotación de la inocencia" [the constant exploitation of innocence] (Dauster 198). The whites destroy indigenous villages and torture Jum, while their treatment of women is equally brutal in the jungle and the city. The *Inconquistables*, for example, who constitute a kind of urban tribe (Weaver 290), blithely participate in a common pastime of the young men and boys of Piura:

A las lavanderas que vuelven del río, a las criadas . . . que van al Mercado, las atrapan entre varios, las tumban sobre la arena, les echan las faldas por la cara, les abren las piernas, uno tras otro se las tiran y huyen. (140)

[They waylay the laundresses coming back from the river or the maids going to market, grab them, throw them down on the sand, pull their skirts over their faces, force open their legs, take turns fucking them, and run away].

In the jungle, the Aguarunas are no less violent to women and girls. According to the account of one of the soldiers,

cuando los chunchos están masateados se las tiran delante de todo el mundo. . . . Sin importarles la edad que tengan, y a la primera que encuentran, a sus hijas, a sus hermanas. (127)

[when the Indians get drunk on *masato* they fuck them in front of everybody. It doesn't matter how old they are, they grab the first one they find, their daughters, their sisters].

On the island, Fushía abuses Lalita on a regular basis, while the ordinarily peaceful Huambisas at one point fly into a rage and decapitate a helpless old man (303).

Absolute values in the form of institutions or codes of conduct are also unable to separate good from evil, and faith in them inevitably leads to disaster.

Representatives of the Church, for example, are either, like the nuns, wilfully naïve and accommodating to those in power, or narrow-minded and vindictive like Father García; in both cases they behave in ways antithetical to the Christian values of love and mercy, and ultimately do great harm to those who trust them. The justice system is no more worthy of confidence. Charles Rossman points out that those like Jum and Nieves, who willingly put themselves into its hands, are the most cruelly exploited of all, precisely because of their blind faith that the system exists to protect people like them from exploitation (272). Unwritten codes of conduct cause even more damage, and fail to bring about anything beneficial. The code of *machismo* is responsible not only for Seminario's death and Lituma's imprisonment, but, as Floyd Merrell observes, for the disintegration of the genuine love that once existed between Lituma and Bonifacia (110). On the other hand, the code of romantic love fails to bring them happiness, just

as it fails in the cases of Nieves and Lalita, or Anselmo and Antonia.

In a world where neither individuals, groups, nor codes of conduct can be relied on, the only thing that resembles a center is, ironically, a core of absolute suffering, strikingly illustrated by two distinct images. The first is the leper colony to which Fushía flees, and which becomes the safe haven he has been seeking for so long. The twofold irony is that, first, it is safe because, as Aquilino reminds him, it is so frightening and repellent to outsiders: "Aunque supieran que estás ahí, no irían" [even if they knew you were there, they wouldn't go] (366), and second, that once inside that haven, Fushía can expect not peace, but pain, disfigurement, and death. The second image is of Jum hanging in agony in the sun of Santa María de Nieva's town square. The power of this image is attested to by the fact that Jum reappears--sometimes briefly, sometimes at length and with a wealth of detail--in several of Vargas Llosa's later novels, not as a symbol of heroic or redemptive suffering, but of utter defeat.

At a writers' conference in Lima in 1969, Vargas Llosa describes a meeting he had with the individual on whom he based his fictional character:

[E]se hombre tenía algo así como un sentimiento de culpa, él da la razón a las personas que lo

torturaron. . . . [É]l trabaja de nuevo con los mismos patrones, aquellos que asaltaron su pueblo . . . y se siente como avergonzado . . . porque piensa que fue por culpa de él, por haber concebido esa idea de la "cooperativa", que el pueblo fue incendiado y que las mujeres fueron atropelladas. (Luchting 236)⁴

[That man has something like a feeling of guilt; he rationalizes the actions of the people who tortured him. He's working once more for the same employers, the ones who attacked his village, and he feels somehow ashamed . . . because he thinks that it was his fault for having conceived the idea of the cooperative, that the village was burned and the women raped].

While the actions of the various characters implicate and otherwise affect one another, they appear to lead nowhere and to have no transcendent meaning. In Michael Moody's words:

No protagonist in the novel has a clear idea of how his predicament relates to larger issues or how the social structure . . . shapes the quality and trajectory of his existence. (14)

Adding to the sense of purposelessness that pervades everything at the end of the novel, Frank Dauster writes:

Hemos seguido a un grupo de personas a través de un período de tiempo, personas de especial cualidad humana [que] ahora están gastados, muertos, o agonizantes. No hay ninguna conclusión; simplemente pasan. (200)

[We have followed a group of people through a period of time, people with special human qualities who are now used up, dead, or dying.

⁴ The quotation originally appears in Primer encuentro de narradores peruanos (Lima: Casa de la Cultura, 1969) 95.

There is no conclusion; they simply pass through].

They act on impulse, and for the most part are unaware of the consequences of their actions until it is too late, as in the case of Bonifacia. Attempting to explain to Mother Angélica why she has allowed the girls to escape, Bonifacia says: "Fue como de casualidad, Madre, sin pensarlo. . . . No tenía la intención, ni se me había ocurrido siquiera, de veras." [It was like an accident, Mother, I did it without thinking. I didn't mean to, it hadn't even occurred to me, really] (66). Impulse is also responsible for the drunken posturing that leads to Seminario's death and Lituma's arrest and imprisonment. In his description of the preparations for the fatal game of Russian Roulette, Vargas Llosa makes an apparently offhand remark that can be interpreted as a kind of sly homage to Arguedas' evocation of adolescence in Los ríos profundos, as well as a chilling comment on the potential deadliness of even the most idle and innocent of childish games. Watching Lituma and Seminario spin the cylinder of the pistol that will shortly kill the latter, one of their companions says: "Parecían dos churros enrollando un trompo." [They looked like two kids winding up a spinning top] (294).

Even characters who act consciously to implement a project never fully understand the reasons for their

failure, or else are unaware that they have failed at all. Mother Angélica chooses to remain blind to her mission's role--and her own involvement--in the corruption of the Indian girls, and eases her own conscience by berating Reátegui for assuming what, despite her feigned ignorance, she secretly knows to be true:

[L]a Misión no es una agencia de domésticas. . . . [E]n la Misión recogían a esas criaturas y las educaban para ganar unas almas a Dios, no para proporcionar criadas a las familias." (133)

[The Mission is not an employment agency for domestics. In the Mission they took in the poor creatures and educated them in order to win a few souls to God, not to provide families with servants]. (117)

The teachers from Lima who spread the idea of a cooperative are sent back to the coast, still unaware of the forces they have unleashed. Fushía refuses to recognize his own role in the direction his life has taken: "tus maldades no te parecen maldades" [your wickedness doesn't seem wicked to you], Aquilino tells him (133), and he insists on blaming others for his fate. In Michael Moody's words:

If [Fushía] were to find an answer to explain the injustice of his life he would know what no man has ever known, and, more than likely, the answer would be of little comfort to him. (20)

The consequences of the characters' actions are, if anything, more irrational than the actions themselves.

Fushía, who is evil, suffers following his misdeeds; however, Reátegui, who is just as evil, prospers. Lituma receives a relatively light sentence for his part in Seminario's death, while Nieves is punished far more harshly for a less serious offense. The innocent suffer along with the guilty, but since there is a story behind every story, unambiguous guilt or innocence can never be assigned. In Rossman's words, "[g]uilt seems oddly impersonal and collective, something that transcends individuals and accrues to the whole network of human activities" (273). Furthermore, there is no assurance that any of the stories are significant or even true, since the reader, as much in the dark as the characters, "is continually obliged to weigh the information of one unreliable narrator against that of another" (Moody 14). It should be noted that the absence of any unifying metanarrative does not reveal, as Booker suggests, a healthy skepticism toward absolutes that "can be read as a plea for *engagement* in the real world" (184); on the contrary, it illustrates what Dorfman sees as Vargas Llosa's growing suspicion that "no hay una verdad, apenas verdades contingentes, perspectivas cambiantes" [there is no truth, only contingent truths, shifting perspectives] (241). In La casa verde, writes Dorfman, "[l]a ley

fundamental . . . es la relativización" [the fundamental law is relativism], with its ominous indication that "[d]esde lejos, desde historias enredadas y simultáneas, se está preparando el fracaso" [from afar, the intertwined, simultaneous stories are pointing to failure] (243).

Despite the prevalence of failure, however, a number of critics argue that at the end of La casa verde the death of Anselmo promises a measure of redemption. In Jones' view, for example, the novel "ends on a positive note of acceptance, reconciliation, and regeneration . . . with a sense of life that compensates for . . . defeat" (87-88). Booker agrees, saying that "despite [its] dark tone . . . the book ends on a highly affirmative note" (16). For Merrell, Anselmo's power to reconcile antagonistic elements is illustrated by the fact that everyone, from the *mangaches* to the *selvática*, wants to claim him as their own (111), while Luchting sees the affirmation as emanating from Lalita and Bonifacia, who accept their far from enviable lives with serenity and grace (238-39). For his part, Luis Loayza attributes the good feeling to the tenacity of the human spirit. At the end of the novel, he writes:

[T]enemos una impresión de profunda afirmación vital. . . . [A] pesar de la injusticia del ambiente social . . . el hombre puede mantener su dignidad. . . . [C]ontra todas las razones para

el desánimo, subsiste siempre cierta obstinada esperanza, cierta alegría. (140)

[We have an impression of deep, vital affirmation. Despite the injustice of the social milieu, man is able to maintain his dignity. In defiance of all the reasons to become dispirited, there persists a certain obstinate hope, a certain joy].

A closer examination of the ending of La casa verde, however, uncovers a forced, false flavor to all this affirmation, and awakens the suspicion that the sense of closure is a trap Vargas Llosa has laid for the reader that recalls the traps into which his characters have already fallen, and which is thus in keeping with the overall tone of the novel.

Anselmo's role as the ultimate peacemaker, for example, is too neatly drawn to be credible. At his death, the two long-time antagonists Doctor Zevallos (Science) and Father García (Religion) are reconciled with the aid of Bonifacia (Love) to pay homage to Anselmo (Art). The patness of this episode points unmistakably to parody, to a subtle sendup of the reconciliation the reader expects despite Vargas Llosa's repeated warnings throughout the novel to expect no such thing. In addition, Anselmo himself remains an enigmatic and therefore unsettling character. In spite of numerous insinuations that the many mysteries surrounding him--of his origins, of the nature of

his relationship with Antonia, and of his possible connection to Bonifacia--will eventually be explained, no explanation is forthcoming, and in the end nothing approaching the truth about Anselmo is ever known.

Equally unconvincing is the argument that Lalita and Bonifacia communicate a message of affirmation through their ability to survive. Lalita, back in Iquitos for the marriage of her son, seems about to relive through him another round of disappointments, as she listens to his description of his hard, ill-paid work in the tannery, and his naïve confidence that "el dueño . . . nos va a mejorar el próximo año, así nos prometió" [the owner is going to give us a raise next year, he promised] (403). More chilling still is the ease with which Lalita dismisses all recollection of Nieves and the suffering he has endured in prison, an uncharacteristic callousness that suggests that in order to reconcile herself to her new life, she has had to forfeit part of her humanity. Bonifacia's spirit has been broken as well, and she no longer attempts even the modestly rebellious gesture of refusing to wear high-heeled shoes. While she, like Lalita, has become "el hombre de la familia" [the man of the house] (428), it is an unenviable position for both women, who find themselves trapped in

directionless lives with dull, unimaginative men who exploit them and suck them dry.

With this sly mockery of the trappings of affirmation and closure, Vargas Llosa paradoxically underscores the bleakness of the postmodern sense of resignation based on an exhaustion of the will rather than on a serene acceptance of fate. Furthermore, as Rossman points out, he narrates the events leading to this state in a style that anticipates, perhaps even encourages

the reader's detachment from the characters. . . . We are curious, sometimes shocked and touched, occasionally outraged at cruelty and injustice. But our relations are to circumstances, events, and forces rather than to individuals with whom we have learned to empathize. . . . We watch, we experience a surge of feeling, then interpret and judge. (269-70)

This detachment exists within the text as well, and constitutes the outstanding trait of the character best equipped to survive in the postmodern world. Anselmo's daughter, known as La Chunga, is a seemingly ageless, genderless *marimacha* whose nickname, significantly, is Spanish for *joke*. As the proprietor of a bordello, she is surrounded by human passion in all its forms and manifestations, yet she observes everything impassively, with eyes that are "abúlicos e impertinentes . . . [i]ndolentes y opacos, semi-muertos" [apathetic and impertinent, indolent and opaque, half-dead] (168-69),

accepts what she sees with equanimity provided that she turn a profit, and declares with postmodern aplomb: "A mí no me importan los asuntos de nadie." [I don't care about anyone's business] (192).

* * * * *

Numerous scholars have concluded from their readings of Los ríos profundos and La casa verde that for Arguedas the universe makes sense, while for Vargas Llosa it does not. Dorfman, for instance, writes:

En [el] mundo de Arguedas . . . la acción tiene sentido, dispone de una jerarquía valorativa, un eje de claridad axiológica en torno al cual girar. Para Vargas Llosa . . . [el] sentido está, si es que se halla en alguna parte, en el recorrido, en el desarrollo, en el no-encuentro. ("Dos visiones" 148)

[In Arguedas' world the action makes sense, because it is based on a hierarchy of values, a hub of clarity around which it revolves. For Vargas Llosa the sense, if it is to be found anywhere, is in the journey, the unfolding, the not-finding].

According to this assessment, then, Arguedas remains a modernist, while Vargas Llosa shows at least a tendency toward postmodernism. The textual evidence discussed above, however, suggests that neither writer is able to embrace entirely one position or the other, and that the two are ultimately more alike in their ambivalence than their surface differences seem to indicate. Arguedas, despite grave misgivings about the existence of "[el]

funcionamiento aparentemente racional del universo" [the apparently rational functioning of the universe] (Dorfman, "Dos visiones" 148), wills himself to hold on to the notion, because to lose faith in it would be to abandon writing, and thus to die. Vargas Llosa, on the other hand, dismisses all thought of a rational universe, yet the very ambiguity of the ending of La casa verde indicates that he is unwilling to surrender himself completely to the cynical contemplation of postmodern anarchy. The result in both novels is a sense of tentativeness, a flirtation with potentially dangerous ideas accompanied by an unwillingness either to commit to them or to abandon them altogether.

A corresponding ambivalence can be found in the rivers that flow around and through the settings of the two novels. Serving both as avenues of communication and as boundaries, the rivers are simultaneously places of refuge and dangerous forces to be feared.

For Ernesto, the Pachachaca is a reassuring presence that soothes and regenerates him:

Había que ser como ese río imperturbable y cristalino, como sus aguas vencedoras. ¡Como tú, río Pachachaca! ¡Hermoso caballo de crin brillante, indetenible y permanente, que marcha por el más profundo camino terrestre! (71)

[We should be like that imperturbable, crystalline river, like its conquering waters. Like you, Pachachaca! Beautiful horse with the

shining mane, unstoppable and permanent, that marches along the deepest of earthly roads!]).

At the same time, however, the Pachachaca is treacherous, "[un] río maldito . . . un río temido" [a cursed river, a feared river] (118) that terrifies the boy and reminds him of his own powerlessness. Similarly, on the Marañón, Fushía and Aquilino find safety and companionship; nevertheless, along the same river travel the soldiers and rubber traders who bring devastation to the people living along its banks. Characters as diverse as Ernesto, doña Felipa, and Lleras in Los ríos profundos, and Fushía, Lalita, and Bonifacia in La casa verde, use rivers to escape their past and start a new life, although none of them succeeds. The fates of the former three are left open to speculation, while the latter fail utterly or pay a high price for their very limited success.

In both novels the presence of the rivers is at once reassuring and unsettling: they promise longed-for changes in the characters' situations, yet at the same time warn them that the change might be for the worse, or that the promise of change is after all only an illusion. The shifting nature of the rivers makes them impossible to define or understand fully, and allows them to be navigated only with great difficulty. The same can be said of the novels themselves, whose shifting positions between

modernism and postmodernism force the reader to navigate between hope that is continually destroyed, and despair that is fended off by the hint that hope might, perhaps, appear again, to be rewarded this time, just around the next bend.

CHAPTER THREE

DENIAL AND DESPAIR IN TODAS LAS SANGRES AND EL HABLADOR

Los ríos profundos and La casa verde end by clinging precariously to the hope of encountering a stable center to their respective worlds, in spite of mounting evidence that this hope is based on an illusion. In Arguedas' Todas las sangres (1963) and Vargas Llosa's El hablador (1987), however, the notion of a center is further undermined, and attempts to salvage a sense of underlying order and meaning grow increasingly desperate. What began as a flirtation with postmodern pluralism, fragmentation, and the absence of truth and *telos* has escalated into a full-blown seduction. In Todas las sangres and El hablador, Arguedas and Vargas Llosa use every rhetorical and ideological strategy they can summon in their efforts to resist ravishment, and even after postmodernism appears to have succeeded in penetrating their defenses, protest earnestly and a little stridently that their modernist values remain intact. Denial becomes a weapon against despair, albeit one whose effectiveness is only partial and temporary.

It is significant that Todas las sangres, the novel that Arguedas considered the fullest statement of his personal values as well as his most accurate depiction of

Peruvian sociopolitical reality (Pinilla 136, 181), has received the harshest critical response of all his fiction, and is deemed an artistic failure--if a grand and ambitious one--by numerous scholars. Even more significant is the lack of critical consensus about just why the novel fails, and what, if anything, its failure means in the broader context of Arguedas' overall body of work. The sharp disagreements among readers of Todas las sangres indicate not only a measure of confusion about Arguedas' intentions in both the literary and the polemical sense, but also about the nature of the reality he attempts to portray. Furthermore, Arguedas' own equally sharp, often contradictory responses to the critical attacks suggest that while he somewhat reluctantly concedes that he may have failed to communicate his ideas clearly, he is as unsure as his attackers about what factors might have contributed to the lack of clarity.

A close examination of both the text itself and the critical responses to it indicates that the perceived failure stems less from any inherent artistic deficiency on Arguedas' part than from the unacknowledged fact that the ideas, values, and sociopolitical norms and structures he explores in the novel have disintegrated before his eyes, and have been usurped by postmodern uncertainties that,

once introduced, are impossible to extirpate or ignore. In a recent study of the critical debate that emerged in Peru immediately following the publication of Todas las sangres, Carmen Pinilla recalls Alberto Escobar's observation that muddled or incoherent elements of the text should be viewed as virtues rather than shortcomings:

[L]a aparente confusión que algunos percibían y criticaban, era el testimonio de la confusión que, precisamente, caracterizaba al Perú. Por lo tanto, era un mérito de la novela el haber logrado transmitir . . . la confusión propia de la realidad que se intentaba expresar. (Pinilla 203)

[The apparent confusion that some perceived and criticized was, in fact, a statement of the confusion that characterizes Peru. Thus, the novel deserved praise for successfully transmitting the confusion of the reality it attempted to express].

Arguedas himself, however, vacillates between agonizing over the difficulty of synthesizing the competing elements of Peruvian reality, which he calls "[un] noble torbellino en que espíritus diferentes . . . [se] atraen, se rechazan y se mezclan . . . [pero que] no concluyen por fusionar sus direcciones" [a noble whirlwind in which different spirits attract, repulse, and intermingle with each other, but which never move in the same direction] (La novela y el problema de la expresión 68), and defending Todas las sangres as both an accurate portrayal of that reality and an expression of a totalizing vision with utopian

overtones. Rejecting the pessimistic view of humanity held by some of his contemporaries, he insists that

el hombre no es una porquería. Quizá sea éste el momento cuando la juventud debe tener fe en este país. ¿Por qué? Porque nosotros nacimos en un país dividido: indios, mestizos y blancos, divididos por vallas casi infranqueables. ¡Jóvenes, estas barreras se están rompiendo, las hemos roto! Yo he contribuido, como han contribuido todos a romper esas vallas. (Pinilla 193)

[man is not a worthless piece of trash. Perhaps now is the time for young people to have faith in this country. Why? Because we were born into a divided country: Indians, mestizos, and whites, separated by almost insurmountable barriers. Young people, these walls are crumbling; we have demolished them! I, along with everyone else, have contributed to the demolition of those walls].

Despite the aggressive optimism of this outburst, however, there is a plaintive tone to Arguedas' words that hints at a profound uncertainty about the future, an uncertainty that he expresses with more directness, but in similarly shrill language, in a letter to Manuel Moreno Jimeno:

¡Se acabaron las grandes experiencias e ilusiones! Sólo quedan una fabulosa frustración, un sentimiento de impotencia y de desamparo, la desesperación absoluta y aterradora de un ser afligido y angustiado, prisionero de un mundo en el cual ahora es incapaz de vivir. (Forgues 22)

[The great hopes and dreams are over! All that remains are a fabulous frustration, a feeling of impotence and helplessness, and the absolute and terrifying despair of a suffering, anguished

being trapped in a world in which he is no longer able to live].

Unable to sustain the forced optimism he attempts to portray in Todas las sangres, having seen the underlying bleakness of his portrayal exposed by critical readers, Arguedas makes what Roland Forgues calls "el paso del pensamiento dialéctico al pensamiento trágico, [lo cual] no es . . . sino la historia de una utopía que desemboca en un dramático fracaso" [the step from dialectic to tragedy, which is nothing less than the story of a utopia that ends in dramatic failure] (444), and begins the steady decline into despair that ends in 1969 with his suicide.

Much of the criticism of Todas las sangres that so devastated Arguedas comes out of the Primer Encuentro de Narradores Peruanos, a conference held in Arequipa in 1965, and which Carmen Pinilla has exhaustively documented in the study of Arguedas cited above. Among the harshest critics is Sebastián Salazar Bondy, who not only accuses Arguedas of failing to give an accurate portrayal of Peruvian sociopolitical reality (196), but, speaking from a Marxist perspective, laments the novel's lack of an ideological framework, and complains that Arguedas does not recognize that "[l]a ideología [es] un instrumento no sólo para orientar el cambio social, sino para conocer correctamente la realidad" [ideology is an instrument not only of social

change, but of a correct understanding of reality] (188-89). As a result, he continues, the novel suffers from "la falta de una propuesta clara de cambio social, en la que se dibujasen más nítidamente tanto las metas a alcanzar como los obstáculos a superar" [the absence of a clear proposal for social change, in which both the goals to be reached and the obstacles to be overcome might be more sharply outlined] (200).

Equally harsh criticism, this time from the opposite end of the political spectrum, comes from none other than Mario Vargas Llosa, who, it should be noted with a touch of irony, attended the Arequipa conference and defended Arguedas against some of his more virulent attackers (Pinilla 175). Since then, Vargas Llosa has written extensively about Arguedas, and has alluded to him more than once in his fiction;¹ however, his critical position, like his well-publicized political views, has undergone a profound change over the last thirty years, so that the admiration that is apparent in essays he wrote in the 1960s has given way to an almost contemptuous tone in his recent (1996) book-length study of Arguedas.

¹ See the discussions of La casa verde and El hablador in this study.

In "José María Arguedas y el indio," published in 1964, Vargas Llosa proclaims his distaste for *indigenismo* as a literary genre. Arguedas, however, transcends the limitations of the genre by virtue of sheer talent, and succeeds in producing genuine works of art because, in Vargas Llosa's view, he is "un gran creador, uno de los más puros y originales que han nacido en América" [a great creative artist, one of the purest and most original ever to have been born in America] (143).

A decade later, Vargas Llosa's enthusiasm has waned considerably. In 1978, he writes that Arguedas was no closer than the traditional *indigenista* writers to producing an accurate portrayal of Peruvian reality, but because he was a better literary craftsman,

su mentira fue más persuasiva y se impuso como verdad artística. . . . Su originalidad consistió en que, al tiempo que parecía «descubrir» la Sierra, realizaba una superchería audaz: *inventaba* una Sierra propia. (Entre sapos y halcones 27,30; emphasis in the original)

[his lie was more persuasive, and asserted itself as artistic truth. His originality lay in the fact that, while he seemed to have "discovered" the Andean world, in reality he played an audacious trick: he *invented* an Andean world of his own].

By 1996, in La utopía arcaica: José María Arguedas y las ficciones del indigenismo, Vargas Llosa has come full circle, and accuses Arguedas of the same *indigenista*

shortcomings that thirty years earlier he had praised him for avoiding. His harshest criticism is aimed at Todas las sangres, which in his view suffers from what he calls *ideologismo*: an elementary Marxism, reverse racism, and the reduction of characters to predictable, cartoonish types (254-55, 272). He complains that "[e]n el mundo de Todas las sangres . . . casi no queda campo para la ambigüedad. Todo es claro en este mundo" [in the world of Todas las sangres there is little room for ambiguity. Everything is clear in this world] (265), yet a few pages later appears to contradict himself when he accuses Arguedas of an excess of ambivalence and a lack of clarity for simultaneously advocating progressive socialism and a return to traditional Indian values (277). The result of this ambivalence, he argues, is a fundamental contradiction that constitutes an artistic flaw:

que una novela escrita con la intención de ser--y no sólo parecer-- . . . progresista, [por] un hombre comprometido con la revolución socialista, resultara, en verdad, una novela emblemáticamente reaccionaria y tradicionalista. (277)

[that a novel written with the intention of being--and not merely seeming to be--progressive, by a man committed to the socialist revolution, should in reality end up being a singularly reactionary and traditionalist novel].

Other critics voice serious reservations about Todas las sangres, but differ when it comes to articulating their

reasons for these reservations. Miguel Gutiérrez, for example, objects to the novel's earnestness and lack of irony, which for him imbue it with an overstated, muralistic quality that undermines any attempt to provide a coherent, totalizing vision (150ff). From a somewhat different angle, more in line with some of Vargas Llosa's concerns, Cornejo Polar faults Arguedas for vacillating between advocating socialist ideals and defending a capitalistic interpretation of the traditional colonial hierarchy (Universos 209). In addition, Cornejo Polar claims that because Arguedas contemplates his chaotic world "a veces con gozo, a veces con terror" [sometimes with joy, sometimes with terror] (259), he is unable to take a definitive moral stand or offer advice for improving that world.

The often striking differences among the various critical responses to Todas las sangres, along with their sometimes surprising vehemence, cast serious doubt on the claim that the novel lacks depth or ambiguity, and suggest on the contrary a high degree of complexity that warrants further study. I will examine two of the strongest critical objections to Todas las sangres--that it is deeply suspicious of the reason and progress it ostensibly supports, and that it fails to demonstrate moral or

political engagement--and will argue that these characteristics should not be considered artistic or ideological shortcomings, but should instead be viewed as evidence of the disorientation and paralysis that accompany the experience of the late twentieth-century version of *desengaño*, the awakening to the irrational formlessness and directionless, meaningless movement that are implied in the postmodern experience.

I will also discuss Arguedas' angry responses to his critics, and will argue that the emotional intensity of his outbursts, along with his refusal to entertain the possibility that some of their concerns might have merit, signal a growing awareness of his own disorientation and paralysis, and are symptomatic of the denial that precedes despair over what he regards as an intolerable situation. A close reading of Todas las sangres will furnish textual evidence to support or refute both the various critical views and Arguedas' reactions to them, and will attempt to determine which positions, if any, should be privileged.

* * * * *

Todas las sangres is framed by a long-standing ideological dispute between the two protagonists, the Aragón brothers, over what should be done to adapt to the inevitable changes that are taking place in the political,

social, and economic structure of Peru. Bruno is a traditionalist who advocates a return to a kind of benign feudalistic paternalism based on what he firmly believes is the word of God (Todas las sangres 185),² and who is determined to protect "his" Indians from contamination by elements of urban life that are already insinuating themselves into the community (116, 195). His brother Fermín, in contrast, favors plunging into the process of industrialization and urbanization that he considers indispensable to the nation's survival. He sees Indian communal values and cultural purity as impediments to progress, and, like his brother, is certain that his ideas are in keeping with God's plan for humanity:

El mundo futuro no es ni será de amor, de la «fraternidad», sino del poder de unos, de los más serenos y limpios de pasiones, sobre los inferiores que deben trabajar. La «fraternidad» es el camino de retroceso a la barbarie. Dios creó al hombre desigual en facultades. Eso no tiene remedio. Hay que respetar y perfeccionar la obra de Dios. (235)

[The world of the future is not and will not be one of love or "brotherhood", but of the power of some, of those who are serene and free of passions, over inferior beings obliged to work. "Brotherhood" leads back to barbarity. God created men with unequal faculties. That cannot be helped. We must respect and perfect God's work].

² Subsequent references to this text will be by page number or, for purposes of clarification, by the initials TS.

Despite their antagonistic views, however, Bruno and Fermín share a distaste for corrupt or incoherent programs for social reform, especially those that are imposed from the outside. They have no use, for example, for Hernán Cabrejos, the opportunistic engineer, aligned with foreign multinational interests, who uses patriotic rhetoric to conceal his self-serving agenda. They are equally contemptuous of the Communists and the *apristas*, whose petty bickering cannot conceal the weaknesses in their respective ideologies, and which ultimately renders them ineffective.

Rendón Willka, the *ex-indio* who returns to the highlands after experiencing life in the city, appears to have developed a program for social reform that incorporates elements of the schemes of both Bruno and Fermín, yet at the same time offers an entirely new vision for the future. A liminal figure who straddles the indigenous and European worlds without belonging to either, he has the advantage of being able to observe his surroundings from a dual perspective denied to the others, and thus can weigh the merits of competing programs skeptically, resist the proselytizing efforts of their advocates, and summarily dismiss those that fail to meet his criteria: "Hey visto comunistas, apristas, socialistas

en Lima. Ningunos saben del indio." [I've seen Communists, apristas, and socialists in Lima. None of them knows anything about Indians] (419). At an intellectual level, Rendón shares Fermín's vision of leading Peru into modernity, but rejects the methods he uses: "Don Fermín como yo es, aunque del otro lado." [Don Fermín is like me, even though he's on the other side] (36). At a deeper, emotional level, however, he is more closely attuned to Bruno because, as Cabrejos observes, "ambos tienen inspiración" [they both have inspiration] (131).

Because Rendón Willka's ideas do not coincide with any existing models and are therefore difficult to categorize, they at first seem to constitute an original plan that offers genuine hope for the future. On closer examination, however, his thought appears fuzzy and inconclusive, resting primarily on a vague, almost mystical faith in the strength and endurance of his people. This vagueness, according to Pinilla, reflects Arguedas' own inability either to accept social programs already formulated by others, or to offer clear alternatives to them:

No podía . . . aprobar ninguna propuesta política que considerase necesario hacer *tabula rasa* con todo el pasado en el intento por construir una nueva sociedad. . . . [Era] reacio a cualquier tipo de militancia que implicase una subordinación de su manera de pensar, de sentir e interpretar la vida, a esquemas predeterminados, o impuestos desde arriba. (123)

[He could not approve of any political proposal that considered it necessary to make of the past a *tabula rasa* in its efforts to build a new society. He resisted any kind of militancy that called for the subordination of his own way of thinking, feeling, and interpreting life, and to schemes that were predetermined, or imposed from above].

While the protagonists in Todas las sangres work to foster their particular notions of progress, and profess hope for the future, they do so with a curious lack of conviction, and betray fundamental doubts that surface repeatedly in seemingly offhand comments laden with ambiguity. "Todo se trastorna" [everything is turning upside down] (66), says one observer, whose remark is echoed by Bruno's "[t]odo está removiéndose" [everything is becoming mixed up] (114), and Hidalgo's "[e]l Perú se sacude" [Perú is trembling] (417). Even Rendón Willka's assertion that "[e]l mundo, el vida camina rápido, hacia lo mejor" [the world, and life, are moving quickly toward better things] (435) is not entirely convincing, due to the persistence of an earlier question that remains unanswered: "¿Cuál es lo verdadero de lo verdadero?" [What is truly true?] (139). The insistent nature of these expressions of uncertainty and apprehension has the effect of undermining the revolutionary optimism with which the novel ends, and of making the evocation of an underground river rising to the surface (456) seem forced, artificial, and desperate.

The accusation that Todas las sangres is peopled with predictable, cartoonish characters has some merit, particularly regarding the portrayal of women and homosexuals.³ Matilde and Asunta, for example, are potentially interesting, vibrant individuals who are not allowed to develop; instead, they lapse into stock representations of the submissive wife and the self-sacrificing martyr, and end up as caricatures of themselves. Homosexual characters fare even worse. Vargas Llosa has pointed out that Arguedas almost invariably portrays them as the embodiment of evil (Utopía 270), an observation borne out by the depiction of the sinister Zar, and by insinuations of effeminacy in other unpleasant individuals such as Llerenas and Velazco. For the most part, however, the characters in Todas las sangres, even the most broadly drawn villains, are relatively complex. The corrupt engineer Cabrejos, though motivated primarily by greed, reveals a glimmer of patriotic sentiment with his only partly ironic insistence that Peruvians like himself, rather than anonymous foreign corporations, should be the

³ For a fuller discussion of this problem in Los ríos profundos and El Sexto as well as Todas las sangres, see my unpublished essay, "Indians and Others: Racial and Gender Stereotypes in the Novels of José María Arguedas," presented at the Afro-Hispanic Literature and Culture Conference in Xalapa, Mexico, May 1998.

ones to exploit the country's resources (73). Indeed, Cabrejos can be seen as a kind of euphoric postmodernist on the order of Valle in Los ríos profundos, who observes as if from a distance the chaos that threatens to engulf him, refuses to resist it and by doing so effectively embraces it, and who uses irony as a means both of taking advantage of it and protecting himself from being overwhelmed by it.

An even more complex villain is Cisneros, an "ex-indio" like Rendón Willka, whose experience in the city has fostered cynicism and self-interest rather than idealistic activism. In words that will appear again in El zorro de arriba y el zorro de abajo, he refuses to consider any suggestion that the city might be the locus of an eventual reconciliation between the indigenous and European worlds: "la ciudad mezcla aceite y agua" [the city mixes oil and water] (203). Subsequently, he makes a conscious decision to reject his Indian identity and align himself with the dominant culture that in turn rejects him. Caught between two worlds, and with no moral or ethical absolutes to guide him, he resorts to arbitrary cruelty as a means of demonstrating his power, and of warding off the fear that his inadequacies will be exposed. Cisneros thus supports Vargas Llosa's contention that in Arguedas' fiction the worst villains are those who are "a medio camino" [in the

middle of the road] between incompatible races, classes, or cultures (Utopía 272). While some remnants of honor emerge during Cisneros' confrontation with Llerenas and Velazco (406-07), he is nevertheless well on his way to becoming an empty shell, and thus of serving as an example of the consequences of the bankruptcy of values in the postmodern world. At the end of the novel, to be sure, he is punished for his presumptuousness and for the disloyalty he shows to his race and class, and is left alone on a mountaintop, naked and weeping (456). However, the apparent finality of his defeat is an illusion, if we recall the prediction that Peru's future lies in the hands of Cisneros and others like him, and that "en las próximas elecciones él será senador" [after the next election he will be a senator] (199).

Ironically, one of the least successful characters in Todas las sangres is Rendón Willka, who is obviously intended to be a pivotal figure and to achieve heroic stature, but who ultimately falls flat. His stoic demeanor, his almost uncanny powers of observation and analysis, and his serene acceptance of his liminal status, are all qualities that are too neatly drawn to be entirely persuasive. Furthermore, he lacks any hint of the internal ambivalence or inconsistency that would make him believable and far more interesting. The result is a kind of

caricature--an unhappy combination of Christ figure and noble savage--that gives credence to Vargas Llosa's dismissal of him as a "supercholo" [superinjun] (Utopía 268).

The most engaging character is Bruno Aragón. In many respects he is the true protagonist of Todas las sangres; he is without question the character with whom Arguedas has the closest affinity, and whose internal conflicts reflect those of his creator. Like Arguedas, Bruno simultaneously identifies with the Indians and keeps himself aloof from them: he looks to the indigenous community in his desperate search for a stable center to his world, yet knows in his heart of hearts that the center, if it ever existed, is gone forever.

Toward the end of the novel there is the promise of a reconciliation of sorts when Vicenta, Bruno's Indian mistress, gives birth to a *mestizo* son whom Bruno recognizes as his legitimate heir. The promise proves hollow, however, as none of the fundamental conflicts of race, class, or culture is resolved, and the new generation gives every indication that it will perpetuate the same oppressive traditions as the old. In Miguel Gutiérrez's words,

[a pesar de la] retórica de la consolación, lo que prevalece son las imágenes de aniquilamiento, de catástrofe, de hundimiento. (176)

[despite the conciliatory rhetoric, what prevails are images of annihilation, of catastrophe, of collapse].

Just as the birth of Bruno's son fails to bring about the longed-for reconciliation of opposing forces, so the publication of Arguedas' literary offspring--the novel Todas las sangres--fails to elucidate, in the eyes of many of its critics, the complexities of the world it attempts to depict. According to Roland Forgues, this double failure is catastrophic for Arguedas. Not only does it mark the end of "la íntima y profunda convicción de que, primero el indio, luego el serrano y finalmente el peruano, pueden y deben liberarse para afirmar su humanidad y su grandeza" [the deep and intimate conviction that, first the Indian, then the highlander, and finally every Peruvian, can and must become free in order to affirm their humanity and their greatness] (142), but it signals as well the onset of Arguedas' rapid, irreversible decline into despair.

Vargas Llosa's allegation that Todas las sangres is the most blatantly *indigenista* of Arguedas' novels (Utopía 271) is as far off the mark as his complaint that it lacks ambiguity (265). On the contrary, it is precisely those

passages that evoke the Indian past that betray both a painful ambivalence toward that past, and a reluctant awareness that it cannot be recaptured. Even Bruno and Rendón Willka, the two characters most closely tied to indigenous tradition, ultimately resign themselves to the idea that racial and cultural autonomy is impossible to achieve, and that *mestizaje*, as exemplified by Bruno's son (and godson to Rendón Willka) is the only alternative. Vacillation between tradition and progress, coupled with uncertainty about the relative merits of Indian and European cultural values, permeate the text, and each of the protagonists is haunted by the fear that the world view he has chosen to adopt, whichever it may be, is wrong. When Rendón Willka turns to nature in an attempt to invoke one of the traditional gods of his people, he is sadly disappointed: "No me ha oído. . . . No me ha contado nada." [He didn't hear me. He didn't tell me anything] (39). However, he resists the temptation to accept the notion that "el Dios de la iglesia . . . [e]s el primer dios" [the God of the church is the primary god] (39), and thus remains in a prolonged, precarious state of indecision that heightens the novel's tension.

The claim that Todas las sangres suffers from an *indigenista* bias is further weakened by the observation,

alluded to earlier and shared by a number of critics, that the white protagonist, Bruno Aragón, is far more carefully drawn and developed than his Indian counterpart, Rendón Willka. Miguel Gutiérrez adds that the relationships between European antagonists--Bruno and Fermín, for example, or either of the two brothers and Cabrejos--are more complex and interesting than those between Europeans and Indians (68). The latter, including Rendón Willka, serve primarily as catalysts affecting intraracial dynamics, and depend on recognition from the Europeans to confirm their identity. Roland Forgues goes so far as to suggest that "[l]uego del desenlace seductor pero utópico de Todas las sangres la realidad recobra sus derechos" [beyond the seductively utopian ending of Todas las sangres, reality reasserts itself], and that the novel retreats into a resigned acceptance of the traditional colonial order, in which not violence, but patient endurance like that exhibited by Vicenta, will ultimately bring about "la humanización de los explotadores y . . . la liberación de los explotados" [the humanization of the exploiters and the liberation of the exploited] (79). It thus grows increasingly apparent that behind Arguedas' call for empowerment of the Indians lies a profound mistrust of their ability to bring about change, and that, in Forgues'

words, "[m]ientras el componente indígena da al mestizo sus raíces culturales, el componente blanco le transmite su dinamismo y su poder transformador" [while the indigenous component gives the *mestizo* his cultural roots, the white component provides him with his dynamism and transformative power] (272).

At the Arequipa conference, the sharpest criticisms of Todas las sangres were directed at its perceived failure, both as an ethnographic document and a literary text, to portray Peruvian reality accurately and coherently. In her account of the proceedings, Carmen María Pinilla defends Arguedas by attacking his attackers, accusing them of an ideological bias that warps their perception of that reality:

[L]os juicios . . . sobre Todas las sangres no podían haberse originado en la confrontación entre la novela y la realidad exterior. . . . Se originaron, más bien, en la confrontación entre la novela y aquellas teorías o ideologías que contenían definiciones precisas al respecto. (196)

[The judgments of Todas las sangres could not have come out of a confrontation between the novel and external reality. Rather, they were born of a confrontation between the novel and those theories or ideologies that already contained precise definitions regarding the matter].

Arguedas' own responses to the Arequipa critics are revealing, as much for their intensity as for their

intransigence. For example, instead of defending himself against Salazar Bondy's attacks by arguing that the lack of a coherent ideological framework in Todas las sangres is indicative of the ambivalence that characterizes Peru's chaotic society, he denies that there is any ambivalence in the novel and insists that his vision of a society based on Indian values of fraternity and cooperation does, in fact, constitute a clearly articulated and coherent ideology (Pinilla 201-02). While the argument is weak, it is at least a defense of sorts, in contrast to the violent outburst with which Arguedas reacts to the suggestion that the novel is not a faithful testimony of Peruvian reality:

¿Que no es un testimonio! Bueno, ¿diablos!, si no es un testimonio entonces yo he vivido por gusto, he vivido en vano, o no he vivido.
(Pinilla 204)

[Not a testimony! Well, damn it, if it isn't a testimony, then I've lived for nothing, I've lived in vain, or I haven't lived].

Unable to refute his critics, who seem to have struck a nerve, Arguedas surrenders to despair tinged with self-pity, and declares that "mi vida ha dejado por entero de tener razón de ser" [I have utterly lost any reason to go on living] (Pinilla 244).

Arguedas once remarked to an interviewer that the "drama heroico" of the displaced urban Indian

[n]o es . . . un tema para las ciencias sociales, es de los novelistas, los únicos que podían penetrar hasta su médula. . . . [N]os lo mostrarán vivo, palpitante, tal cual es . . . y lo difundirán por el mundo. (Pinilla 116)⁴

[is not a subject for social scientists, but for novelists, the only ones who can penetrate to its marrow. They will show it to us as it is, throbbing with life, and they will disseminate it throughout the world].

His experience at the Arequipa conference, however, teaches him that the artist is no better equipped than the social scientist to communicate the Indians' story to outsiders. This realization, added to the unacknowledged suspicion that his cherished notion of a coherent, ordered reality is erroneous, leads him simultaneously to berate his critics for their obtuseness and to berate himself for failing to articulate his ideas effectively. The result is an overwhelming sense of futility.

According to Sara Castro Klarén, "[h]ell, for Arguedas, is the total absence of values which support man's life as a free being" ("A Change of Skin" 96). This being the case, the postmodern landscape of contingency, tentativeness, and the absence of absolutes is something that Arguedas cannot bear to contemplate, because it negates the possibility of meaningful moral choices and

⁴ Interview with Carlos Zavaleta: "Discusión de la narración peruana." Gaceta de Lima 12 (September 1960): 10.

destroys hope. Ironically, in Todas las sangres he does contemplate that landscape in all its bleak confusion and unbearable richness, but cannot bring himself to acknowledge the significance of what he sees. He thus passes up the opportunity to take on the challenge of living in the midst of chaos, and instead retreats into a forced optimism that lacks the power to halt his descent into self-destructive despair.

* * * * *

Like Todas las sangres, Mario Vargas Llosa's El hablador attempts to depict, and in so doing to clarify and explain, the complex relationships among the various indigenous and European elements of Peruvian society. As part of his strategy for achieving this aim, he revisits a central theme of La casa verde--the story of Jum--in an effort to come to terms with what Mark Millington calls cultural "blurrings, fault lines, hierarchies, appropriations, marginalities, and assimilations" (165). However, while the narrator initially claims to occupy the same position of neutral outside observer that he held in La casa verde, the pretense of objectivity gives way to an outspoken advocacy of the assimilation of the Indian into mainstream society:

¿Qué ilusión era aquella de querer preservar a estas tribus tal como eran, tal como vivían? En

primer lugar, no era posible. Unas más lentamente, otras más de prisa, todas estaban contaminándose de influencias occidentales y mestizas. Y, además, ¿era deseable aquella quimérica preservación? ¿De qué les serviría a las tribus seguir viviendo como lo hacían y como los antropólogos puristas . . . querían que siguieran viviendo? Su primitivismo las hacía víctimas, más bien, de los peores despojos y crueldades. (El hablador 72)⁵

[What was that illusion of preserving these tribes just as they were, just as they lived? In the first place, it wasn't possible. All of them, some more slowly, some more quickly, were becoming contaminated by western and *mestizo* influences. And besides, was that fanciful notion of preservation even desirable? What good was it for the tribes to continue living as they did, and as purist anthropologists wanted them to live? Their primitivism only made them victims of the worst kinds of abuse and cruelty].

For Millington, Vargas Llosa's ideological shift is subtle but significant, and is presented in such a way as to downplay its radical nature:

El hablador is more positive and forthright than La casa verde about the perceived importance of assimilating Amazonian Indians into westernized society. This is not entirely unambiguous, but the careful positioning of the narrator's viewpoint between apparently more extreme views tends to validate his position as pragmatic and moderate. (174)

Despite the narrator's insistence, however, the issue remains unresolved. Ambiguities persist, and questions raised by opponents of assimilation are not successfully

⁵ Subsequent references to this text will be by page number or, for purposes of clarification, by the initials EH.

laid to rest. On one occasion Saúl Zuratas, the novel's most vocal critic of the attempts to acculturate the Indians, laments that

los estamos agrediendo, violentando su cultura. . . . Con nuestras grabadoras y estilográficos somos el gusanito que entra en la fruta y la pudre. . . . Nosotros, con el cuento de la ciencia, somos la punta de la lanza de los exterminadores de indios. (34)

[We're aggressors; we're doing violence to their culture. With our pens and our tape recorders, we're the worm that rots the fruit. With our scientific talk, we're the point of the exterminator's spear].

Other, related issues are not addressed, but ignored or summarily dismissed: alienated, half-urbanized Andean Indians, for example, are somewhat offhandedly categorized as "un pueblo sonámbulo, de vasallos" [a population of sleepwalkers, of vassals] (98), and are never mentioned again.

Each of the protagonists of El hablador offers a solution to Peru's social problems, and the various solutions coincide, overlap, contradict one another, and eventually fall apart. Yet the protagonists vehemently deny what is becoming increasingly obvious, that the chaos threatening to engulf them is not a temporary condition that can be remedied, but is the way things are.

The first of the protagonists, Saúl Zuratas, is from the outset marginalized by different groups for different

reasons, and his role as outcast becomes the cornerstone of his identity. His physical deformity, of course, sets him apart from the community as a whole; however, his Jewishness has nearly as much power as his birthmark to isolate him from the mainstream society of Lima, although it is not powerful enough to make him feel at ease in the Jewish community that rejected his mother:

la comunidad no la aceptaba no tanto por ser una goie como por ser . . . una mujer sencilla, sin educación, que apenas sabía leer. Porque los judíos de Lima se habían vuelto unos burgueses. (14)

[the community didn't accept her, not so much because she was a *goy*, but because she was a simple, uneducated woman who barely knew how to read. Because the Jews of Lima had become middle-class].

In the narrator's half-laudatory, half-disparaging treatment of Saúl's marginality, one can detect echoes of Vargas Llosa's own ambivalence toward Arguedas. Saúl, like Arguedas, is portrayed as obsessed to the point of fanaticism with preserving what he sees as the purity of the Indian way of life: "el mundo indígena, con sus prácticas elementales y su vida frugal, su animismo y su magia . . . parecía haberlo hechizado" [the indigenous world, with its elemental practices, its frugal way of life, its animism and magic, appeared to have bewitched him] (21). The narrator's mixed feelings of affection and

impatience toward this "hombre de ideas fijas" [man of *idées fixes*] (23) resonate with the same contradictions and ambiguities Vargas Llosa has expressed repeatedly in his writings about Arguedas:

si no hubiera sido tan buena persona, tan generoso y servicial, probablemente hubiera dejado de frecuentarlo. Porque lo cierto es que se volvió monótono. (EH 23)

[if he hadn't been such a good person, so generous and obliging, I probably would have stopped seeing him. Because the truth is that he turned into a bore].

Saúl's marginality, like that of Arguedas, is partly involuntary and partly self-imposed. It becomes for him both a defining characteristic and a source of pride, so that Cornejo Polar's observations regarding Arguedas hold true for Saúl as well:

se autodefinió como un forastero permanente y . . . llamaba el «forasterismo» esa desasosegante experiencia de ser hombre de varios mundos, pero a la larga de ninguno. ("Condición migrante" 103).

[he defined himself as a permanent outsider, and gave the name "outsiderness" to the disquieting experience of being a man of several worlds, but ultimately of none of them].

In El hablador, the narrator makes an even more pointed comparison when he slyly alludes to what will be the title of Vargas Llosa's book on Arguedas in a seemingly offhand remark about idealists "tan irreales y románticos como Mascarita [Saúl] con su utopía arcaica y antihistórica" [as

unrealistic and romantic as Mascarita, with his archaic, antihistorical utopia] (77).

Saúl's sense of marginality and rootlessness is what enables him to identify with the Machiguengas and attempt to enter a community that, ironically, would have eliminated him for being physically defective had he been born into it. Compounding the irony is the fact that Saúl, defender of indigenous cultural purity and enemy of cultural intervention from outside, insinuates his own values into his narrative and attempts to alter other, Machiguengua values of which he disapproves. The result is a travesty of coherent cultural discourse, consisting of the superimposition of one imperfectly understood collection of values upon another so that, in Alicia Andreu's words,

ambos van perdiendo sus delimitaciones originales a medida que van adoptando aspectos de la palabra del otro. Al final, los dos discursos se distinguen por la ambivalencia, como producto de la convivencia. (346)

[they both proceed to lose their original delimitations as they take on aspects of the other's words. In the end, both discourses are distinguished by their ambivalence, a product of this intermingling].

What emerges bears a striking resemblance to Fredric Jameson's postmodern *pastiche*: multiple surfaces with no depth, multiple copies with no original, and mimicry devoid

of the insight necessary for parody (Postmodernism 17). Trapped in the midst of narratives that simultaneously conflict and overlap, Saúl, writes Pilar Rotella, "parece sumergido . . . en la proliferación excesiva de sus referencias intertextuales" [seems to be submerged in the excessive proliferation of his intertextual references] (102), and is ultimately swallowed up by his own words.

If, as Rotella suggests, the *hablador* is searching for a master narrative [una historia matriz] and in so doing "examina un mito central--el de la creación--y lo presenta en sus múltiples vertientes y consecuencias" [examines the central creation myth and presents its multiple aspects and consequences] (100), his project fails utterly. The common threads that run through the various versions are never woven into a recognizable pattern, but end up in a tangled heap. In addition, while the *hablador* includes didactic elements--advice and admonitions--in his stories, he continually undermines his own teachings. A recurring theme in his narrative, for example, is the importance of serenity and acceptance:

La rabia es un desarreglo del mundo, parece. Si los hombres no tuvieran rabia, la vida sería mejor de lo que es. (119)

[Anger disorders the world, it seems. If men didn't become angry, the world would be better than it is].

Elsewhere, he says:

Lo importante es no impacientarse y dejar que lo que tiene que ocurrir, ocurra. . . . Si el hombre vive tranquilo, sin impacientarse, tiene tiempo de reflexionar y de recordar. (184)

[The important thing is not to become impatient, and to let what must happen, happen. If men live peacefully, without becoming impatient, they have time to reflect and remember].

Despite the fact that similar pleas appear again and again throughout the narrative, nearly every anecdote the *hablador* relates is suffused with *rabia*, impatience, and resentment.

Similarly, Saúl, in his role as ethnographer, insists that non-intervention is the only means of preserving the cultural integrity of Peru's indigenous peoples:

[E]sas culturas deben ser respetadas. . . . Y la única manera de respetarlas es no acercarse a ellas. No tocarlas. Nuestra cultura es demasiado fuerte, demasiado agresiva. Lo que toca, lo devora. Hay que dejarlas en paz. (97)

[Those cultures must be respected. And the only way to respect them is not to go near them. Not to touch them. Our culture is too strong, too aggressive. Whatever it touches, it devours. We must leave them alone].

Nevertheless, it is clear that he fails to follow his own advice. Without exception, the Machiguengas' stories involve some sort of cross-cultural contact, suggesting that, despite Saúl's protests, such contact is impossible to avoid. The attempt to synthesize the various elements

of Machiguenga myth, history, and culture into a coherent metanarrative leads not to clarification, but to increased obfuscation, and heightens the sense of fragility and precariousness that permeates the Machiguengas' world. That the *hablador* himself is aware of the unreliability of his own narrative is suggested by his use of *quizás* [perhaps] and *parece* [it seems] to qualify every statement he utters.

The search for a myth that will evoke a unified, integrated Machiguenga community *in illo tempore* is doomed from the start, because there is no evidence that any sort of tribal unity ever existed. Isolated and marginalized long before the Conquest, the Machiguengas appear never to have possessed any form of cultural coherence or formal societal structure:

Su origen era un misterio total; su identidad borrosa. . . . Estaban en movimiento desde tiempos remotos y era probable que jamás hubieran vivido de manera gregaria. . . . No existía un solo poblado machiguenga. . . . Estaban pulverizados en minúsculas unidades de, a lo más, una decena de personas. (81)

[Their origin was a complete mystery; their identity hazy. They had been on the move since remote times and had probably never lived in a communal fashion. There was not a single Machiguenga village in existence. They were dispersed in tiny units of at most ten people].

Even individual Machiguengas are devoid of identity in the sense that

[carecen] de nombres propios. Su nombre [es] siempre provisional, relativo y transeúnte: el que llega o el que va . . . el que nació o el que disparó la flecha. (81)

[they lack proper names. Their names are always provisional, relative, and transient: he who arrives or he who goes; he who was born or he who shot the arrow].

The absence of cultural cohesiveness, along with the lack of a strong individual identity, no doubt contributes to the prevalence of suicide among the Machiguengas, which is alarming not only for its frequency, but for the fact that

[u]na contrariedad insignificante [puede] empujar al machiguenga a matarse. [Es] como si su voluntad de vivir, su instinto de supervivencia, se hubiera reducido a su mínima expresión. (82)

[an insignificant annoyance can push the Machiguengas to kill themselves. It is as if their will to live, their survival instinct, had been reduced to its lowest degree].

While the attitude of the Machiguengas toward both Indian and European outsiders is one of suspicion, hostility, and fear (82), and while a stated purpose of their incessant wandering is to avoid contamination by contact with strangers, they are in fact constantly forced to interact with others, whether they be ethnographers, missionaries, the narrator, or the *hablador*. Moreover, it is this interaction, rather than the avoidance of it, which gives them a semblance of identity by affording them

something with which to compare themselves. Sara Castro Klarén expresses this idea as follows:

Machiguenga wisdom holds that the Machiguengas must at all costs stay away from all other cultures. . . . But at another level of discourse . . . it is the Machiguengas' inextricable relationship to cultural and biological purity in relationship to survival in historical identity that articulates the central issue of the novel. (Understanding Mario Vargas Llosa 218)

The irony, of course, is that Saúl, who insists that cultural isolation is the only possible salvation for the Machiguengas, is the very one who makes the most blatant intrusion into that isolation. In Castro Klarén's words, "Zuratas's role as *hablador* vitiates the entire argument on behalf of the cultural self-sufficiency of the Machiguengas" (219).

The *hablador* attempts to perpetuate the illusion of a fundamental unity,

recordando a cada miembro de la tribu que los demás vivían, que, a pesar de las grandes distancias que los separaban, formaban una comunidad y compartían una tradición. (91)

[by reminding each member of the tribe that the others were alive, and that in spite of the distance that separated them, they formed a community and shared a tradition].

Although he considers his stories to be "la savia circulante que hacía de los machiguengas una sociedad, un pueblo de seres solidarios y comunicados" [the sap that

circulated among the Machiguengas and made them a society, a people characterized by solidarity and communication] (91-92), they are in fact formless, fragmentary, and incoherent; like the Machiguengas' wanderings, they have no beginning and no end.

The *hablador's* additions and alterations to the narrative, taken from Western myth and literature, have the potential to enrich the tribal *mythos*, but fail to do so. The stories of the Jews, of Christ, and of Gregor Samsa, remain irremediably foreign, and as a result, writes Emil Volek:

El *mythos* narrativo de El hablador termina bifurcándose y, así, se resiste a ser englobado por un mito unificador. . . . De ser una confrontación, las dos líneas se convierten en «dos mundos posibles», en dos destinos separados, alternativos y paralelos. (118)

[The narrative *mythos* ultimately splits in two, and in so doing resists inclusion in a unifying myth. Instead of confronting one another, the two narrative threads become "two possible worlds," two separate, alternative, parallel destinies].

For María Isabel Acosta, Saúl's intervention into the Machiguenga world constitutes an act of bad faith:

By becoming an *hablador* he already transgresses his theory of nonintervention, and by his use of intertextuality he betrays his intent of preserving the Machiguenga culture. . . . By making the *hablador*, the supposed representative of pure native culture, an example of cultural intervention, the novel makes clear that there are no easy solutions, perhaps no solutions at

all, to the problems of cultural intervention in the case of the Machiguengas. (139)

However, she fails to detect that there is a twofold irony here, in that Saúl's interference in Machiguenga myth not only undermines the unity it is meant to promote, but at the same time gives weight to his arguments *against* cultural intervention. Thus, Saúl dramatically illustrates the merit of his convictions by the very act of betraying them.

An additional factor that heightens the confusion and compounds the irony surrounding perceptions of the Machiguenga situation is the consideration that, as Mark Millington indicates, "all the viewpoints and actions in the novel relating to the Machiguengas' assimilation belong to those who are not Machiguengas" (174). The "real" Machiguenga narrative, if such a thing exists, is inaccessible to Saúl, so he replaces it with one of his own fabrication (Acosta Cruz 36). Not only does this fiction represent "una esperanza vana e ilusoria de poder encontrar el secreto que lo conduzca a la revelación de la palabra" [the vain and illusory hope of finding the secret that will lead him to the revelation of the word] (Andreu 351), but it gives rise to the suspicion that the Machiguengas indeed have no collective memory, and hence no myths at all (Castro Klarén, Understanding Mario Vargas Llosa 220-21).

If that is the case, they are infinitely susceptible to exploitation by outsiders, as evidenced by the fact that they have unwittingly allowed what passes for their narrative to be manipulated to accommodate the fears, weaknesses, and resentments of the *hablador*.

The novel's other narrative voice is that of an intellectual from Lima, temporarily self-exiled in Florence in order to escape his country's limitations and to read Dante and Machiavelli in their original language and on their native soil. What appears to be a modernist quest for absolutes or, more specifically, for confirmation of his preconceived notion that "la revelación de la palabra" is to be found in western poetic and philosophical discourse, is already complicated by his choice of texts that betray some fundamental internal contradictions within a single tradition. That is, while Dante's Commedia evokes an orderly, purposeful, rational universe governed by a just and merciful God, Machiavelli presents a program for an orderly, purposeful, rational state in which justice and mercy have no place. When the narrator accidentally stumbles upon an exhibit of photographs of Amazonian Indians, the intrusion of what he sees as the irrationality of Peruvian indigenous life puts an end to "el proyecto tan bien planeado y ejecutado hasta ahora" [the project that

had been so well planned and so well executed until now] (7), and obliges him to recall other, equally unsuccessful attempts to impose order on his world.

One such attempt is the television documentary series, *La Torre de Babel*, a popular, pedestrian program that the narrator and his colleagues attempt to transform into a global representation of Peruvian reality. The project is plagued with difficulties from the very beginning, however, some technical, and others more difficult to explain. Mysterious gray spots appear from nowhere and deform the image on the television screen in the same way that Saúl's birthmark deforms his face. Flash bulbs break for no apparent reason. Batteries die and motors stall, leading the narrator to suspect that "los dioses manes de la Amazonía estaban contra la Torre de Babel" [the spirits of the dead of the Amazon basin were opposed to the Torre de Babel] (145). Although the television series continues despite the obstacles, and even gains a measure of popularity, the continued difficulties, coupled with its creators' overly eager desire to be all-inclusive, result in programs that, instead of presenting "un caleidoscopio de temas" [a kaleidoscope of themes] (142) with a recognizable pattern, are instead a chaotic jumble of images, disconnected and unclear.

The narrator's attempt to revisit the episode of Jum is equally unsatisfying. The detached, fragmentary narrative that appears in La casa verde is supplanted by a more detailed analysis of the events, their presumed causes, and their predicted consequences. However, the explanation offers little in the way of enlightenment, and to some extent dilutes the understated power of the original account.

Jum's story serves a threefold purpose for the narrator, allowing him simultaneously to repudiate his youthful socialistic leanings, to rebut Saúl's arguments in favor of nonintervention in indigenous cultures, and to advocate assimilation as the only possible recourse open to Indians whose way of life is irrevocably doomed:

¿Creíamos, de veras, que el socialismo garantizaría la integridad de nuestras culturas mágico-religiosas? ¿No había ya bastantes pruebas de que el desarrollo industrial, fuera capitalista o comunista, significaba fatídicamente el aniquilamiento de aquéllas? ¿Había una sola excepción en el mundo a esta terrible, inexorable ley? (76)

[Did we really believe that socialism would guarantee the integrity of our magical-religious cultures? Wasn't there already enough proof that industrial development, no matter whether it was capitalist or communist, invariably brought with it the annihilation of those cultures? Was there even one exception to this terrible, inexorable law?]

Jum, however, is a powerful character who resists both acculturation and compartmentalization, and who is not easily laid to rest. Consequently, the narrator's attempt to bring the episode to closure appears forced and artificial, and betrays once again his urgent desire to impose order on an increasingly chaotic world.

In order to avoid sliding into the anarchy of relativism and despair, the narrator insists on taking a firm position on different issues. He wills himself, for example, to believe that Saúl is the *hablador*: "He decidido que el hablador de la fotografía . . . sea él. Pues, objetivamente, no tengo manera de saberlo." [I've decided that the *hablador* in the photograph is he. But objectively, I have no way of knowing] (230).⁶ Similarly, he persuades himself that assimilation of the Indians into the dominant culture will alleviate his country's gravest social ills. In the same way, and with the same absence of foundation, he makes himself believe that he has gained insight from his experiences and can communicate that

⁶ The uncertainty surrounding the photograph is compounded by the suggestion that there is more than a casual connection between Saúl and the photographer, Gabriele Malfatti. The narrator refers to his friend as "un arcángel," for example, and *malfatto* is Italian for *deformed*.

insight to others. Ironically, the narrator's desperate adherence to these convictions is every bit as romantic and unrealistic as Saúl's own desperate longing to recapture an idyllic past.

The multiple, contradictory narratives of El hablador ultimately obfuscate rather than elucidate. No single truth is privileged; on the contrary, all are equally compelling, and at the same time equally suspect. The dangers inherent in any all-encompassing utopian scheme are made abundantly clear: the narrator's advocacy of the assimilation of the Machiguengas into mainstream society, like the *hablador's* defense of their cultural separatism and the Schneils' dedication to their evangelization, are all projects that contain within them the seeds of repression, since the success of any one of them requires the elimination of dissent. The alternative, however, would be the acceptance of chaos, which for Vargas Llosa is an invitation to despair, and as such is intolerable. He therefore, in the persona of the narrator, makes a conscious decision to interpret events in such a way that allows him to deny the encroachment of despair and cling to the illusion of an ordered universe. After "deciding" that the figure in the photograph in the Florence gallery is an *hablador*, and that the *hablador* is Saúl, he declares:

Después de darles muchas vueltas y combinarlas unas con otras, las piezas del rompecabezas casan. Delinean una historia más o menos coherente, a condición de detenerse en la estricta anécdota y no preguntarse por lo que Fray Luis de León llamaba «el principio propio y escondido de las cosas». (230-31)

[After turning them over again and again and combining them in various ways, I find that the pieces of the puzzle fit together. They trace a more or less coherent story, provided that one limit himself strictly to anecdotes and refrain from wondering about what Fray Luis de León called "the private, hidden principle of things"].

Having willed himself to embrace this view, the narrator proceeds to reconstruct in his imagination Saúl's metamorphosis from Jewish intellectual into Machiguenga *hablador*; however, he finds himself unable to make the leap of faith necessary to "añadir lo imposible a lo que era sólo inverosímil" [add the impossible to the merely implausible] (233). His reason intrudes, reminding him that

hablar como habla un hablador es haber llegado a sentir y vivir lo más intenso de esa cultura, haber calado en sus entresijos, llegado al tuétano de su historia y su mitología, somatizado sus tabúes, reflejos, apetitos y terrores ancestrales. (234)

[to speak as an *hablador* speaks is to have succeeded in becoming a part of the most intimate reaches of that culture, of having probed its deepest secrets, to have reached the marrow of its history and its mythology, to have internalized its taboos, reflexes, appetites, and ancestral terrors].

He is thus trapped in a liminal state, profoundly skeptical of the "historia más o menos coherente" he has fabricated, yet denying that skepticism because to do so would be to open the way for despair.

* * * * *

In both Todas las sangres and El hablador, the attempt to reconcile contradictions so as to reveal an underlying harmony fails to quell a nagging sense of desperation based on the suspicion that the task is impossible, because to continue to maintain faith in the notion of an underlying harmony is to believe a lie. However, the failure of the conciliatory projects is less surprising than the elaborate, and ultimately futile, measures taken to deny that they have failed. Todas las sangres ends on a resolutely positive note, with Rendón Willka's redemptive sacrifice, the birth of a legitimate *mestizo* heir to Bruno Aragón, and the subterranean rumblings of Indian resistance to the established order. In a similar fashion, El hablador ends by suggesting a possible reconciliation among conflicting cultural elements, with Saúl, in his persona of *hablador*, as catalyst. At the same time, however, any suggestion of synthesis, reconciliation, or hope is undermined as soon as it is expressed. The promise of reform that accompanies the birth of Bruno's son is offset

by the image of the Indians kneeling before the newborn child, humbly vowing to work "para el patrón niño . . . por orden del patrón grande" [for the young master, by order of the old master] (449). In El hablador, the synthesis that appears to emerge from Saúl's blending of narratives from indigenous and western traditions is revealed upon closer scrutiny to be not a blend at all, but a *pastiche*, devoid of authority or substance. Consequently, as Volek notes, "el cierre utópico, utilizado con tanta eficacia por el *mythos* tradicional, no cierra" [the utopian closure, used so effectively by the traditional *mythos*, fails to close] (114).

Any remaining illusion of order or stability is shattered by the revelations that take place in brief but powerful scenes that evoke the postmodern landscape of aimlessness, confusion, and the promiscuous mingling of incongruous elements with no indication that they will ever become integrated.

In Todas las sangres there are two such revelatory scenes. The first is a description of the social clubs in Lima, sites of gatherings where young, displaced Indians from the highlands go to relax and enjoy themselves in the company of people like themselves, but which have become stilted, artificial, and discomfoting:

Hombres y mujeres intentaban asimilar rápidamente los modales ciudadanos; aprendían los bailes de moda y a usar los trajes y peinados impuestos por la influencia norteamericana. La mayor parte de estos emigrados exageraba los nuevos usos de la ciudad, y la forma como danzaban los bailes de moda, procurando demostrar que los dominaban, daban a la apretada concurrencia de los salones alquilados un aspecto entre grotesco y triste. . . . Era evidente que muchas de las parejas no se divertían, sino que simulaban. (326)

[Men and women made an effort to adapt quickly to city ways; they learned the latest dances and wore the clothes and hairstyles imposed by North American influence. Most of these *emigrés* exaggerated their new city manners; and the way they danced, trying hard to demonstrate that they had mastered the steps, made the crowd in the rented ballrooms look both grotesque and sad. It was obvious that many of the couples were not enjoying themselves, but were simulating].

The second, even briefer scene begins as a glowing description of the fledgling fishmeal industry located in the seaport of Chimbote. Hoping to persuade Fermín to invest in it, his business associates paint a utopian picture of a domestic enterprise, untainted by foreign interests or capital, which, by employing indigenous workers, will contribute to the process of acculturation. One of the group offers a very mild objection: "No es fácil. . . . En Chimbote ya hay barriadas inmundas." [It isn't easy. In Chimbote there are already filthy slums] (339). Said in passing, this statement nevertheless evokes the image of Chimbote as a locus of chaos and misery that

negates every effort to impose or recapture a state of harmony. It is an image that invites despair, and whose power becomes evident when it comes to dominate Arguedas' last novel, El zorro de arriba y el zorro de abajo.

El hablador ends with a comparable scene of confusion and chaos that wields its own kind of power. Having willed himself to find meaning in the *hablador's* tales, and having achieved a kind of closure by writing about him, the narrator attempts to recapture the rational, orderly view of the universe that had brought him to Florence to study Dante and Machiavelli. As he walks about the city on a hot summer night, he finds that its serene beauty has given way to "otro espectáculo, más truculento . . . de putas, maricones y vendedores de drogas" [another, more ghastly spectacle of whores, faggots, and drug dealers] (235), and that the city has been taken over by

conjuntos de maraqueros y tumbadores caribeños,
equilibristas turcos, tragafuegos marroquíes, una
tuna española, mimos franceses, jazzmen
norteamericanos, adivinadoras gitanas,
guitarristas alemanes, flautistas húngaros.
(235)

[Caribbean percussion bands, Turkish acrobats,
Moroccan fire-eaters, a Spanish minstrel group,
French mimes, North American jazzmen, gypsy
fortune tellers, German guitarists, Hungarian
flautists].

What in the past he saw as an amusing carnival has become a Tower of Babel with a menacing quality from which he

desires to escape but cannot: "A veces es agradable perderse un rato en esa multitud variopinta y juvenil. Pero esa noche iría donde fuera, en vano." [Sometimes it's pleasant to lose oneself for a while among this variegated, youthful crowd. But that night I would have gone anywhere else, in vain] (235). It dawns on him that it is equally vain to attempt either to understand the *hablador* or to deny his ongoing presence. Reason and will are powerless to fend off the despair that accompanies the postmodern throng invading the public square.

CHAPTER FOUR

CHAOS AND BEYOND IN EL ZORRO DE ARRIBA Y EL ZORRO DE ABAJO

In the two novels under consideration in this chapter and the next, Arguedas' El zorro de arriba y el zorro de abajo¹ [The Fox from Above and the Fox from Below] (1971) and Vargas Llosa's Lituma en los Andes [Death in the Andes] (1993), the authors abandon the strategy of denial that has proven to be ineffective as a defense against encroaching chaos, and proceed to the inevitable next step of direct confrontation. Any attempts they make to use literature as a means of imposing order on an ever more disorderly landscape are sporadic and perfunctory, and ultimately fall apart. Instead, an atmosphere of exhaustion and defeat permeates the texts, signaling the onset of a despair that spills over into the writers' personal lives.

Los zorros, the posthumously published novel that Arguedas undertook to write on the advice of his psychiatrist as a means of combating his paralyzing depression,² can be read on one level as a 250-page suicide

¹ Henceforth, within the body of the text I will use the abbreviated title Los zorros.

² José María Arguedas, El zorro de arriba y el zorro de abajo, ed. Eve-Marie Fell (Paris: Archivos, 1990) 8; 10.

note in which a disjointed, fragmentary narrative is interspersed with autobiographical *diarios* that, among other things, document Arguedas' struggle between his love of life and his longing for death. The latter prevails, and in 1969 he kills himself, leaving the novel unfinished, after having declared in an open letter to his colleagues and students at the Universidad Agraria:

Me retiro ahora porque . . . he comprobado que ya no tengo energía e iluminación para seguir trabajando, es decir, para justificar la vida.
(Fell 253)

[I leave now because I have determined that I no longer have the energy or the vision to continue working, that is to say, to justify my life].

Vargas Llosa is, of course, very much alive, and continues to write prolifically on a wide range of subjects. However, Lituma en los Andes was written during a period of well-documented despair, as a direct response to two events, which will be discussed in the next chapter, that had a profound effect on Peru's political situation and on Vargas Llosa's own life and thought. Discouraged at what he saw as a bleak future for his country, and for himself as a resident of that country, he emigrated

Subsequent references to the novel will be by page number or, for purposes of clarification, by the initials ZZ. References to correspondence and critical essays included in the volume will be by the editor's name and the page number.

definitively, vowed never again to participate in or write about Peruvian politics,³ and in 1993, the year Lituma en los Andes was published, renounced his nationality and became a citizen of Spain.

The intimate intertwining of the lives of Arguedas and Vargas Llosa with their texts cannot be ignored or dismissed, and appears at first to indicate their unwilling surrender to the idea of relativism, of surface with no depth, of a multiplicity of meanings that cancel each other out and result in meaninglessness; in short, to all the attributes of postmodernism that the two writers had previously resisted by means of denial and the fabrication of an illusion of order. However, a closer examination of Los zorros and Lituma en los Andes, along with statements Arguedas and Vargas Llosa have made in essays and interviews, suggest that it is not, after all, the vision of postmodern chaos that is responsible for their despair, but rather a vision--perhaps only a glimpse--of a deeper, darker order beneath the deceptively bleak surface, an order so terrifying that it makes the prospect of mere chaos look almost inviting.

³ See Mario Vargas Llosa, "Regreso a la barbarie," in Desafíos a la libertad (Mexico City: Aguilar, 1994) 116-17. In the same essay, he admits to being unable to keep his vow, and proceeds to write in detail about the political climate in Peru.

Los zorros is, in Arguedas' own words, "una novela algo inconexa que contiene el germen de otra más vasta" [a somewhat disjointed novel that contains the seed of another, larger work] (Fell 249), and as such, lends itself to a wide variety of critical interpretations. However, as Vargas Llosa points out rather caustically in La utopía arcaica, the contradictory critical responses tend to shed more light on the political and theoretical positions of the critics than on the enigmatic text itself.⁴

From a Marxist perspective, for example, Los zorros depicts the class struggle and offers hope for a utopian,

⁴ Not surprisingly, Vargas Llosa's harshest words are aimed at critics on the Left:

Para tratar de rescatar ideológicamente a Arguedas para el Bien, los críticos celadores de la corrección política aseguran que Los zorros denuncia . . . el desarrollo capitalista. . . Sin embargo, cualquier lectura no entorpecida por el prejuicio descubre de inmediato que el Mal . . . se enraiza en la esencia del sistema industrial. . . La noción misma de desarrollo, de modernización, de adelanto tecnológico, es exorcizada en el libro. (46)

[In order to rescue Arguedas ideologically and preserve him for Good, critics who are guardians of political correctness assure us that Los zorros denounces capitalism. However, any reading not hampered by prejudice discovers immediately that Evil is rooted in the essence of the industrial system. The very notion of development, of modernization, of technological advancement, is exorcized in the book].

post-revolutionary future. In the words of Arguedas' widow, Sybila Arredondo, the novel is

un intento más de Arguedas para enseñarnos a captar . . . nuestra realidad. Aprender esa complejísima realidad e iluminar la lucha de clases, la vida del pueblo peruano, de modo que el lector se encuentre en ella y no equivoque caminos al enfrentar la historia. (Fell 275)

[one more attempt on the part of Arguedas to teach us to understand our reality. To capture that extremely complex reality and to shed light on the class struggle and the life of the Peruvian people so that the reader enters into it and doesn't take the wrong path when he sets out to confront history].

César Germaná is even more specific in his political reading of Los zorros. For him, Arguedas

[c]onsidera que el capitalismo ha corrompido los valores humanos fundamentales en todos los órdenes de la vida social. . . . [L]a alternativa al mundo cosificado y alienado del capitalismo Arguedas la encontrará en el socialismo y éste será el principio fundamental que orientará su vida y su obra. (110-11)

[considers that capitalism has corrupted the fundamental human values in every aspect of social life. The alternative to the reified, alienating world of capitalism is, for Arguedas, to be found in socialism, which will be the fundamental principle on which he bases his life and work].

Other critics find a mystical basis for what they regard as the underlying optimism of Los zorros. For William Rowe, Arguedas' faith in the promise of a utopian future is linked to his nostalgia for an idyllic indigenous past:

La meta y el significado de las luchas de los explotados sólo se revela en un nivel apocalíptico en forma de un milenarismo. . . . [E]l deseo de Arguedas [es] de modernizar las nociones míticas o religiosas tradicionales . . . y la visión milenaria viene a ser un modo de ligar lo antiguo y lo nuevo en un período de cambio, y no un modo de trascender lo antiguo. ("El nuevo lenguaje" 211-12)

[The goals and the significance of the struggles of the victims of exploitation are revealed only at an apocalyptic level, as a kind of millenarianism. Arguedas wants to modernize traditional mythical or religious notions, and the millenarian vision becomes a way of linking the old and new during a period of change, not a way of transcending the old].

In an entirely different vein, Martin Lienhard sees hope as emanating from Arguedas' concept of "el lector colectivo, que crece poco a poco a lo largo de la novela, para convertirse al final, algo míticamente, en actor de la historia" [the collective reader, who grows little by little throughout the course of the novel, and by the end becomes a somewhat mythical character in the story] (Cultura andina 177). There is a mythical, mystical flavor as well to Lienhard's evocation of future readers of Los zorros, who will be better equipped than we to grasp the nuances and complexities of the novel because they will come "del grupo más culto--pero no aculturado--del sector inmigrado bilingüe y bicultural" [from the most cultivated--but not acculturated--group, from the bilingual, bicultural immigrant sector].

Most critics, it should be noted, find in Los zorros none of the utopianism or optimism discussed above. On the contrary, despite sometimes sharp differences in their individual readings of the novel, they generally concur that its overall tone is highly ambivalent, that it ends on an almost unbearable note of tension and uncertainty, and that it answers none of the troubling questions it raises. According to Roland Forgues, for example, Arguedas' inability to answer questions or reconcile conflicts in the world he portrays in Los zorros leads him to adopt a tragic vision of that world:

Su drama consiste en una dolorosa y trágica percepción del conflicto absurdo y degradante entre la alta y generosa idea que él se hace del hombre y la comunidad, y la realidad contingente donde le ha tocado vivir. (Del pensamiento dialéctico 19)

[His drama consists of a painful, tragic perception of the absurd and degrading conflict between his lofty, generous concept of man and community, and the contingent reality in which it is his lot to live].

For Antonio Cornejo Polar, the novel's lack of closure is appropriate to its underlying theme of tentativeness and suspenseful open-endedness: "[es] inacabable por esencia, tan inacabable como el universo que [pretende] representar" [it is essentially unfinishable, like the universe it attempts to represent] (Los universos narrativos 265). Its fragmentary form, he adds, "va mostrando las piezas de un

rompecabezas que se arma y desarma continuamente en busca de un modelo inexistente" [shows the pieces of a puzzle that is continually being put together and taken apart, in the pursuit of a nonexistent model] (283).

In Mario Vargas Llosa's view, the novel's refusal to adhere to a single theme or idea, or to espouse a particular set of beliefs, is in keeping with one of the primary functions of literature: "socavar las bases mismas sobre las que se asienta toda fe y . . . poner a prueba (lo que equivale a relativizar) todo conocimiento racionalista del mundo" [to undermine the foundations of all faith and to put to the test (which means to relativize) all rationalistic knowledge of the world] (La utopía arcaica 23).

Of course, the most revealing examples of Arguedas' ambivalence about the future of his country, particularly with regard to the prospect of socialism as a cure for Peru's political and social ills, come from the author himself. He freely admits to uncertainty about the relative merits of the capitalist system as opposed to a kind of socialism combined with traditional indigenous values:

¿Qué es mejor para el hombre . . . la competencia individual, el incentivo de ser uno más poderoso que todos los demás, o . . . la cooperación

fraternal de todos los hombres, que es lo que practican los indios? (Pinilla 191)⁵

[What is better for mankind, individual competition and the incentive of becoming more powerful than the rest, or fraternal cooperation among all people, which is what the Indians practice?]

While he poses the question in simplistic terms that leave no doubt that he favors the latter option, he does, at the very least, avoid closing off debate on the issue. In addition, he is adamant about his personal distaste for supporting an idea or a cause through political partisanship:

Yo no milito en las filas de ningún partido político, no me he inscrito en los registros de ninguna agrupación partidarista; mi conducta ha estado normada siempre por la inspiración de mi propia conciencia, en la más absoluta libertad. (Pinilla 121)⁶

[I am not active in any political party; I am not a member of any partisan group; my conduct has always been based on inspiration and on my own conscience, in absolute freedom].

Nevertheless, in Los zorros he gives evidence of what appears to have been a profound political radicalization, influenced in part by a visit to Cuba, but more importantly, according to Roland Forgues, by his second

⁵ From José María Arguedas et al, Primer encuentro de narradores peruanos (Lima: Latinoamericana Editores, 1968) 239.

⁶ From José María Arguedas, "Rectificación a una publicación en La Tribuna. La Prensa (September 18, 1947): 3.

wife, Sybila Arredondo, and her associates on the extreme Left (Fell 314). His unabashed, almost childlike praise of postrevolutionary Cuba is expressed in language so overwrought that it invites suspicion of a hidden touch of irony: "[;C]uando llegue aquí un socialismo como el de Cuba se multiplicarán los árboles y los andenes que son tierra buena y paraíso!" [When socialism like that of Cuba arrives here, trees will grow and the land will be fertile, as in Paradise!] (Fell 9). The suspicion of irony increases when, later in the same paragraph, he addresses a young Cuban acquaintance by referring to "la fuerza con que mataste para construir lo que ahora es para ustedes la vida justa" [the force with which you killed in order to build what is now for you a just life] (9).

Equally puzzling, though for different reasons, is Arguedas' often quoted statement from the "¿Último diario?":

Quizá conmigo empieza a cerrarse un ciclo y a abrirse otro en el Perú y lo que él representa: se cierra el . . . del azote . . . del odio impotente . . . del temor a Dios y del predominio de ese Dios y sus protegidos, sus fabricantes; se abre el de la luz y de la fuerza liberadora invencible del hombre de Vietnam . . . el del dios liberador. (245-46)

[Perhaps along with my life a cycle will end and another will begin in Peru and all it represents: the cycle that is ending is that of the whip, of impotent hatred, of the fear of God and the power of that God and his protegés, his fabricators;

the cycle that is beginning is that of light, of the invincible, liberating power of the people of Vietnam, of the god of liberation].

Beneath the revolutionary, apocalyptic language is a shrillness, a frantic quality that suggests doubt rather than conviction, despondency rather than hope. Moreover, the forced optimism of Arguedas' words is belied by the fact that they were written, after all, as a prelude to his suicide. In short, this statement does little or nothing to clarify Arguedas' political position or his vision of the future of Peru, and serves only to intensify the ambiguities and contradictions of Los zorros.

It becomes clear that any attempt to force Los zorros to fit into an ideological mold or a system of order is bound to fail, if one realizes that one of the novel's primary functions is to document, strikingly and sometimes brilliantly, the collapse of ideologies, mythologies, assumptions, and articles of faith that contribute to the illusion of order and attempt to serve as defenses against the onset of postmodern chaos. The first to fall is the conviction that a return to the indigenous values of community, cooperation, and solidarity will bring about a just, orderly society and provide protection against outside enemies. As we have seen, in Los ríos profundos and Todas las sangres these values, though challenged, for

the most part remain intact, as illustrated by the solidarity of the *chicheras* and the *colonos* in Los ríos profundos, and by hints of an incipient, large-scale popular uprising at the end of Todas las sangres. In both these novels language, and to an even greater extent music, are powerful forces that unite the Indians, connect them to their past, and act as buffers against the intrusive white culture of the coast. The strength of Indian values is probably best illustrated, in Todas las sangres, by Rendón Willka, the *ex-indio* who gains valuable skills and insights when he emigrates to Lima, but whose profound identification with the indigenous community enables him to withstand the corrupting influence of the coast and, upon his return to the highlands, to provide leadership for his people. Even so, occasional jarring elements, such as the depiction of the erosion of Andean traditions in the Lima social clubs, serve as reminders of the fragility of Indian values in an urban environment, and are reinforced by the apprehension Arguedas reveals, outside the context of the novels, when he writes that "[u]na angustia creciente oprime a quien desde lo interno del drama contempla el porvenir" [a growing anguish oppresses those who contemplate the future from within the drama] (La novela y el problema de la expresión 56).

In Los zorros, the future has arrived in the boom-town of Chimbote, and with its arrival all of Arguedas' deepest misgivings are realized. Indigenous values and traditions have been corrupted beyond recognition or have disappeared entirely, so that the Indians who come down from the mountains to the coast truly become *ex-indios*. Unable to compensate for this loss of identity by finding a niche in the *mestizo* or *criollo* sectors of the city, they end up alienated and utterly lost. Asto, for example, after an encounter with a white prostitute, scornfully denies his Indianness despite the fact that he is barely able to speak Spanish: "Yu . . . criollo, carajo. . . . ¿Quién serrano, ahura?" [I'm a *criollo*, damn it. Who's Indian now?] (39), and with his newfound arrogance fulfills the prediction of an observer that "[d]esde mañana fregaré a sus paisanos, será un caín, un judas" [starting tomorrow he'll screw his fellow Indians, he'll be a Cain, a Judas] (39).

Communication among and within the different racial and cultural groups of Chimbote is all but impossible because of the deterioration of language. The newly arrived Indians, like Asto, speak only a rudimentary Spanish, while those who have lived on the coast long enough to become at least partly acculturated have forgotten their native Quechua and have therefore become

separated from their community and their past. As a result, language, instead of helping to give meaning to an alien world, renders it even more incomprehensible and thus more terrifying. In William Rowe's words,

[e]l lenguaje . . . es disyunctivo; separa las cosas y nos puede llevar a la confusión al no lograr crear un mensaje unificado. . . . [E]l lenguaje verbal, en el contexto de Chimbote . . . está separado del mundo natural. ("El nuevo lenguaje" 200)

[language is disjunctive; it separates things and can lead us into confusion when it fails to create a unified message. Verbal language, in the context of Chimbote, is separated from the natural world].

The lack of cohesion caused by the erosion of a common language and the consciousness of a common tradition leaves the Indians of Chimbote powerless to defend themselves against injustice and exploitation. To make matters worse, in the disarray that is a permanent feature of the city, it is all but impossible to identify the oppressor, much less unite against him. As one character laments, referring to a succession of failed attempts to organize the slum dwellers of Chimbote: "Nadie sabe contra de quién." [Nobody knows whom to be against] (65). His words recall Stuart Hall's lament that in the postmodern world, "[t]he dispersal of what used to be called 'the enemy' into a whole system leads to the difficulty of putting together any kind of oppositional politics" ("Clinging to the

Wreckage" 31), and underscores the sense of futility and growing desperation that nearly all the characters in Los zorros appear to share.

Arguedas' position on the idea of *mestizaje* as a defense against disorder and a remedy for the divisions plaguing Peru has fluctuated, and has never been clearly articulated. In La novela y el problema de la expresión literaria en el Perú, he portrays the *mestizo* as an agent of discord rather than harmony, claiming that he tends to "[e]rguirse . . . contra indios y terratenientes, meterse como una cuña entre ellos" [look down on both Indians and landholders, and to act as a wedge between them] (59). In addition, it is clear that Arguedas regards the situation of the *mestizo* as artificial and uncomfortable, and fully recognizes its affinities with his own awkward position as what Cornejo calls "un forastero permanente" [a permanent outsider] ("Condición migrante" 103) straddling two cultures. Nevertheless, some of his most powerful and self-sufficient characters are *mestizos* (or, more precisely, *mestizas*), such as doña Felipa and the *chicheras* in Los ríos profundos, while in Todas las sangres, the importance placed on the birth of Bruno's *mestizo* son suggests a reluctant acknowledgment of *mestizaje*, not only

as inevitable, but as perhaps the only hope of approaching a state of racial and cultural unity.

In Los zorros, in contrast, Arguedas abandons the hope he tentatively expressed in Todas las sangres, and discards the notion of reconciliation through *mestizaje* as a cruel illusion. *Mestizos* do not belong to both white and Indian cultures; they belong to neither, and attempts to integrate the two only exacerbate the differences between them. Roland Forgues' insightful comments on the failure of acculturation can be read to include *mestizaje* as well. He outlines the situation as follows:

El mundo infernal de Chimbote . . . nos ofrece la imagen trastocada de lo que José María Arguedas había imaginado en forma ideal para su país en sus relatos anteriores. . . . [E]l proceso de aculturación . . . en vez de acercar a los diferentes estratos sociales, por el contrario, los va separando y dividiendo más y, por lo tanto, aleja definitivamente toda posibilidad real de que se forje la verdadera nacionalidad peruana. ("Por qué bailan los zorros" 308)

[The hellish world of Chimbote offers us the underside of the ideal image José María Arguedas had conceived in his earlier works. The process of acculturation, instead of bringing the different social strata together, separates and divides them even further, and thus does away with any real possibility of forging a true Peruvian nationality].

In Chimbote, *mestizos* are mongrels who have all but forfeited their humanity, and have come to resemble the "zombies" Saúl Zuratas speaks of with pity and scorn in El

hablador (26). Consequently, the concept of *mestizaje* has receded into the realm of myth. Forgues writes:

La comunicación entre la sierra y la costa sólo se da ahora a través del mito, porque el *mestizaje* ha perdido todo alcance real para convertirse en una referencia ideal e idealista sin relación alguna con la realidad. ("Por qué bailan los zorros" 309)

[Communication between the mountains and the coast takes place only through myth, because *mestizaje* has lost its real dimensions and has become an ideal, idealistic concept with no relationship whatsoever to reality].

Along with *mestizaje*, however, Arguedas' conception of myth has undergone some drastic changes.

Indigenous myth and magic, together with different variants of Christianity, figure prominently in Arguedas' fiction, although his attitude toward them, indeed, his overall disposition toward the supernatural, is difficult to pin down. A longing for the return of the Andean gods and spirits runs through much of his work, alongside the painful awareness that they are silent, perhaps forever, and that "[e]l Dios de la Iglesia . . . [e]s el primer Dios" [the God of the Church is the primary God] (TS 39). Nostalgia is futile, even something of an indulgence, for it is clear that, as Ignacio Díaz Ruiz writes, "[s]i el Dios católico se une al hacendado, el Dios indígena simplemente no existe" [if the Catholic God is on the side of the landowner, the indigenous God simply does not exist]

(70). It follows that, in Los ríos profundos and Todas las sangres, the Church is portrayed in an overwhelmingly negative light, as one of the many arms of the hegemonic structure whose primary purpose is to ensure, through intimidation, that the Indians remain submissive, and to quell any attempts at resistance or rebellion.

Even so, in both novels there are suggestions that religious syncretism can be used in creative ways: as protest, or as a tool of liberation, and perhaps, ultimately, as a means of arriving at reconciliation and unity. In Los ríos profundos, for example, the colonos' prayer to ward off the plague contains both Christian and indigenous elements, and the fact that it is answered leads to the speculation that the indigenous gods have somehow interceded to influence Father Linares to say the Catholic mass the Indians desire so fervently. Paradoxically, in Todas las sangres, which purports to be a novel of reconciliation, the Indian and Christian deities cross paths and invade one another's territories, but never coalesce. Before he commits suicide, Andrés Aragón vilifies the village priest and declares his preference for the indigenous gods, saying that "[m]e han convertido en indio" [they have turned me into an Indian] (15), and when his wife Rosario dies, she is buried with Indian, not

Christian, rites. At the end of the novel, Bruno's son is baptized into the Catholic Church and the Indians kneel before him; however, elsewhere, in the subterranean rumblings that follow Rendón Willka's death, the voices of the long-silent Andean deities can be heard.

The engagement with myth, magic, and religion in Los zorros is less oblique and tentative than in Los ríos profundos and Todas las sangres, but the outcome is in some ways even less satisfying, prompting Vargas Llosa to conclude, with characteristic bluntness, that "[l]a dimensión mítica no llega a cuajar" [the mythical dimension fails to take shape] (La utopía arcaica 298). While the mythical foxes of the title intervene in the characters' lives, comment on events, and make their presence felt in a variety of situations, the nature of their role and purpose in the narrative is far from clear, and has been subjected to a number of different, and often contradictory, critical interpretations.

For some, the foxes play a positive role as harbingers of a utopian future that will incorporate elements of an idyllic past, or at the very least as witnesses of a fundamental harmony underlying the seemingly insurmountable barriers between the competing cultures of Peru. Antonio Cornejo Polar, for example, writes that

los zorros cumplen con alegría su tarea de siglos
de comunicar a los pueblos de arriba y de abajo
. . . confiados en su poder y seguros de
coincidir con el orden primordial del mundo.
(Fell 300)

[the foxes joyfully fulfill their centuries-old
task of communicating between the people from
above and those from below, confident in their
power and certain that they are at one with the
primordial order of the world].

Fergus Mitchell's assessment of the role of the foxes
reveals an even more hopeful outlook:

Their very presence carries with it a joyful
optimism, an effervescence that rises above the
heavy environment, above the harshness of
life. . . . [T]hey have come to dialogue and to
narrate, but they have also come to intervene,
and to point the way. (53-54)

Others see the foxes as mere observers, as a kind of
chorus that comments on the action and offers advice,
warnings, and admonitions to the actors, but that has no
power to alter the course of events. For Walter Berg, the
foxes may once have possessed such power, but "han perdido
la capacidad de prestar auxilio eficaz a los necesitados
protagonistas de Chimbote" [have lost the capacity to lend
effective aid to the needy protagonists of Chimbote] (125).
Their impotence, in his view, is symptomatic of the overall
failure of indigenous myth to make sense of or give meaning
to the pervasive state of confusion:

[S]e ha comprobado la ineficacia cultural del
mito de Huatyacuri . . . [y] el propósito de
entender la realidad de Chimbote a partir de un

modelo tradicional de la cultura quechua resultó un fracaso. (127)

[The cultural ineffectiveness of the myth of Huatyacuri has been demonstrated, and the effort to understand the reality of Chimbote by means of a traditional model of Quechua culture has resulted in failure].

Claudette Kemper Columbus reinforces this view with specific reference to don Diego, a persona of the Fox from Below. In his dialogue with don Ángel in the fishmeal factory, she writes, don Diego

attempts to open alternative spaces and discourses. . . . But his attempts fail. The sick system remains in place. . . . Even tricksters of the highest order, masters of information and discourse, seem unable to instigate change, no matter how brilliantly they perform. ("Tricksters in the Fishmeal Factory" 170, 174)

While Columbus regards don Diego as a failure,⁷ Martin Lienhard finds him to be at least partly successful as a trickster, in his attempt to manipulate don Ángel "a traicionarse y a traicionar a los industriales harineros, revelando la 'verdad oculta' sobre Chimbote" [to betray himself, and to betray the leaders of the fishmeal industry, by revealing the "hidden truth" about Chimbote] (Cultura andina 115). For William Rowe, on the other hand, don Diego is not a trickster at all, but a mythical figure

⁷ See also her article, "Arguedas's De-auto-rized Biography: A Failed? Trickster's Tale," in Latin American Literary Review 21 (1993): 21-33.

of formidable power, capable of transforming society by means of "[l]a magia . . . [que] puede considerarse como una mediación del deseo que . . . rompe con un sistema (capitalista) y propone otro (utopía o 'socialismo mágico')" [magic, which can be considered a mediator of the desire that rejects one system (capitalism) and proposes another (utopia or "magical socialism")] (Fell 334).

The ambivalence that surrounds the foxes and gives rise to the critical disagreements discussed above is in part deliberate, but only in part. Arguedas clearly intends the foxes to be enigmatic, shadowy figures who dance in and out of the world of Chimbote and hover around the edges of the other characters' lives, and in this respect he succeeds. Less successful, however, is his attempt to portray them as powerful supernatural beings; that is, as timeless, awe-inspiring, and vaguely menacing. In fact, they appear more often as annoying intruders than as dangerously disruptive forces, and seem to be more of a nuisance than a threat. As mythical figures, they fail to "cuajar", as Vargas Llosa rightly complains, and their metamorphoses and other feats of magic have more of the flavor of parlor tricks than of the divine. Ironically, their ambivalence in this regard does not add to their

mystery, but detracts from it, and turns potentially memorable characters into flimsy caricatures.

A similarly disconcerting ambivalence surrounds the various manifestations of Christianity depicted in Los zorros, and calls attention to the mixture of confusion and fanaticism that characterizes religious expression in Chimbote. Efforts to proselytize have failed to win converts except on a superficial level, and attempts at syncretization have resulted in an incoherent jumble of conflicting beliefs and superstitions. Still more bothersome is the fact that, like the foxes, the representatives of religion in Los zorros are ambivalent partly by design and partly because of the author's negligence: they are, for the most part, portrayed schematically, and are not allowed to develop fully. Consequently, their potential significance is never realized.

The most interesting of these characters is Moncada, the mad, self-styled seer and prophet who carries with him a stuffed doll that is a caricature of himself (54), and who displays his madness by caricaturing Christian ritual. He wanders the streets of Chimbote bearing a heavy cross, and consumes the remains of a rooster and a guinea pig in a revolting simulacrum of the Eucharist that approaches both

burlesque and blasphemy (58-59). His impassioned sermons imitate the language of the teachings and prophecies of the Bible; however, they neither teach nor prophesy, but merely call attention to the already obvious sordidness and hopelessness of life in Chimbote, and rail against all manner of oppression. What is missing, significantly, is any message of hope or redemption, and the absence is underscored when, in a private conversation, Moncada spontaneously blurts out his true thoughts about the human condition: "Estamos demoniados. . . . ¿Quién no?" [We're cursed. Who isn't?] (154).

In the "¿Último diario?" Arguedas indicates that he intended Moncada to deliver a final sermon that would give coherence to his disjointed ideas and weave together the various threads of the novel into a cohesive unit, "[p]orque él es el único que ve en conjunto y en particular las naturalezas y destinos" [because he is the only one who sees both the parts and the whole of natures and destinies] (243). Arguedas' stated intention is never carried out, of course, and so Moncada remains an engaging, yet unfinished and therefore deeply ambivalent character, whose ambivalence causes some of the people of Chimbote to revere

him as "[un] loco santo, negro, mejor que Fray Martín,⁸ que Juan XXIII!" [a mad, black saint, better than Brother Martín, better than [Pope] John XXIII!] (60), while others dismiss him scornfully: "Ese mierda es sólo un loco de mierda." [That shit is just a madman full of shit] (60).

The ineffectiveness of both indigenous and Western supernatural powers is illustrated by Esteban de la Cruz, a miner who refuses to believe that he is dying of silicosis. Told by an Indian *brujo* that if he spits up five ounces of carbon his lungs will be cleared, he faithfully weighs his sputum, ignores his rapidly declining strength, and persuades himself that his health is improving. Moncada humors him, and conceals the fact that his faith in the power of the Indian healer is tepid at best:

Escupa, compadre. El brujo sabe de la pesada del carbón qui'hay en el pulmón del minero. Del gringo y del gobierno, del voltiar del mundo, d'eso no conoce, sueña antiguallas. No li'hagamos caso en cuanto al orden del ordenamiento universal nuevo mundo. Pero escupa usted. (161)

[Spit, *compadre*. The *brujo* knows about the weight of the coal dust in the miner's lungs. He doesn't know about *gringos* or the government or about the world turned upside down; his dreams are old and out of date. Let's not pay attention

⁸ The reference is to St. Martin de Porres (1579-1639), an Afro-Peruvian who began his religious life as a servant and was known as "Fray Escoba" [Brother Broom]. Canonized in 1962, he is revered by the poor throughout Latin America.

to what he says about ordering the new world order. Just spit].

Attempts to incorporate Western beliefs into the effort to save Esteban are similarly fruitless. Both he and Moncada ridicule the evangelical Christian sect Esteban's wife has joined, not only rejecting its "aire de extranjero mandón" [air of foreign pushiness] (154), but accusing it of being dull, spiritless, and devoid of passion. In Moncada's words:

El evangélico no chupa, no miente, es limpio. . . . Pero su aliento, quiero decir, su vida, tomado en su completo, es desabrido. No tiene sal, compadre, menos pimienta. . . . Su canto también es desabrido, ¿no es cierto, compadre? ¿A usted le gustan esas canciones con guitarra que cantan? Nu'es guitarra, nu'es alegría, nu'es tristeza. (150-51)

[The evangelical Christian doesn't drink, doesn't lie, he's clean. But his breath, I mean, his life on the whole, is flavorless. It has no salt, *compadre*, much less pepper. Even his songs are dull, aren't they, *compadre*? Do you like those songs they sing and play on the guitar? That's not guitar music; there's no joy or sadness in it].

Esteban, however, has an abundance of passion that he makes use of in his fierce struggle, and it is clear that the postponement of death, however brief, is due solely to the strength of his character and his will to live, not to the intervention of any supernatural power.

Orfa's suicide, to which Arguedas alludes in the "¿Último diario?", is yet another indication that the

indigenous gods are impotent or dead. Unable to accept the apparently meaningless suffering that pervades Chimbote, she calls on the mountain spirits for protection. Upon realizing that none is forthcoming, she takes her own life in a gesture of despair that, as César Caviedes points out, anticipates that of the author (75).

Arguedas does, however, introduce the concept of liberation theology as an alternative to traditional Catholicism, evangelical Protestantism, and Indian religious belief, and presents it as a cause for renewed hope because of its vision of a utopia that is both spiritual and revolutionary. José Luis Rouillón correctly observes that Father Cardozo and his companions "son los primeros sacerdotes que son aceptados plenamente de manera positiva en la obra narrativa de Arguedas" [are the first priests to be fully accepted in a positive way in Arguedas's narrative] (351); however, they are also among the least convincing of all Arguedas' literary characters, and their philosophy is presented with an unquestioning approval that has about it an air of inauthenticity. Particularly troublesome are Father Cardozo's statements of his political and religious beliefs: not only are they utterly at odds with the expression, throughout the rest of the novel, of what Forgues describes as "[la pérdida de la]

fe en la búsqueda de la universalidad, o sea en la posibilidad de cambiar el mundo" [the loss of faith in the quest for universality, that is, in the possibility of changing the world] (Del pensamiento dialéctico 74), but they have the forced, artificial quality of a catechism memorized without conviction:

La revolución . . . no será obra sino de estos dos ejemplos, uno divino, el otro humano, que nació de ese divino: Jesús y el «Che». . . . El Señor hizo al «Che» . . . para redención del católico y mediante esa redención librar al humano. . . . [Y]o acepto andando por la senda luminosa⁹ que Juan XXIII abrió especialmente para la salvación del humano maltratado . . . que la Iglesia ha aprendido, se ha transfusionado con la sangre del «Che». (235, 237)

[The revolution will be the work of no one but these two examples, one divine, the other human born of the divine: Jesus and "Che". The Lord made "Che" for the redemption of Catholics, and through that redemption, the liberation of all people. I accept, after walking along the shining path that John XXIII opened for the salvation of all oppressed people, that the Church has learned from and been transfused by the blood of "Che"].

The utopian fervor of this segment has a false ring to it, and clashes with the overwhelming sense of desperation that pervades the rest of the novel. Its forced optimism

⁹ Cardozo's allusion, in garbled Spanish, is obviously a reference to the *Sendero Luminoso* (Shining Path). The reference, and the tone of the entire speech, support Roland Forgues' claim that the revolutionary ideas in Los zorros are strongly influenced by Arguedas' wife, whose involvement with the *senderistas*, for which she was subsequently imprisoned, is well known.

supports Forgues' assertion that for Arguedas, at the end of his life, "[l]a imagen mítica de la Revolución Cubana . . . se convierte en una referencia ideal en la que el escritor quisiera creer y en la que no obstante ya no cree" [the mythical image of the Cuban Revolution has become an ideal reference point in which the writer would like to believe, but in which, nevertheless, he no longer believes] (Del pensamiento dialéctico 23), and gives weight to Vargas Llosa's much criticized claim that the revolutionary posturing in Los zorros, as a prelude to Arguedas' suicide, is intended to promote

[la] imagen del militante radical que ofrenda su vida por la revolución socialista . . . [y que] tiene por objeto dejar claramente sentado de qué lado se halló Arguedas en la lucha social. ("Literatura y suicidio" 13)

[the image of the militant radical who offers his life for the socialist revolution, and which has as its object the clear indication of which side of the social struggle Arguedas is on].

Ironically, because the attempt to inject religious or revolutionary hope into Los zorros fails so completely, it ultimately, if inadvertently, contributes to the sense of crushing, all-encompassing despair that is the novel's primary strength.

The question remains: to what extent is Los zorros a literary success or failure? Its rough, fragmentary, unfinished state can be considered a defect; Arguedas

himself refers to his last work, somewhat apologetically, as "entrecortado" [fractured] (243). However, this very characteristic is what best reflects the fragmented, contingent world of Chimbote, and emphasizes the disorientation and alienation experienced by those who inhabit that world. In La utopía arcaica, Vargas Llosa makes this same point when he write approvingly:

[E]sta novela, pese a sus deficiencias, y, curiosamente, en parte debido a ellas, se lee con la intranquilidad que provocan las ficciones logradas. El lector sale de sus páginas con la impresión de haber compartido . . . uno de esos descensos al abismo que ha sido privilegio de la literatura recrear en sus momentos malditos. (296)

[One reads this novel, despite its deficiencies, and, strangely enough, in part because of them, with the uneasiness that successful fiction provokes. The reader closes the book with the impression of having participated in one of those descents into the abyss that literature has had the privilege of recreating in its accursed moments (*moments maudits*)].

In addition to the confusion and turmoil of Chimbote, Vargas Llosa continues, that of Arguedas' own psyche is evoked by "[e]l clima de acabamiento, de podredumbre moral y material, de desvarío, de disolución lingüística" [the atmosphere of exhaustion, of moral and physical decay, of delirium, of linguistic dissolution] (299).

The novel fails when it strays from its powerful portrayal of the breakdown of the values that sustain the

world of Chimbote and attempts to insert or invent substitute values that will hold that world together. The foxes represent one such attempt: not only do they fail to bring about communication or reconciliation between the worlds of above and below, but they lack the air of mystery, myth, and magic that they promise to convey, and never succeed in coming to life as characters. Similarly disappointing is the effort to politicize the novel, to abandon the vivid picture of a society in ruins, and instead to force the text to obey the requirements of a utopian vision. The revolutionary fervor appears tacked on and inauthentic to such an extent that, according to Forgues, it is Arguedas' awareness of his own inauthenticity that, more than anything else, leads him to leave the novel unfinished:

En la imposibilidad de llevar a cabo . . . [la] radicalización política . . . estimulada más aún por su segundo matrimonio y su trato con ciertos sectores de la extrema izquierda peruana es donde reside la verdadera explicación del inacabamiento del relato. (Fell 314)

[In the impossibility of bringing about the political radicalization (of the novel), encouraged primarily by his second wife and by his dealings with certain sectors of the extreme left in Peru, can be found the real explanation for why he left the story unfinished].

However, once again, these flaws, serious though they are, may be viewed as part of the overall strength of Los

zorros, for they add to the sense of utter disorientation, of the need to grasp at any suggestion of stability only to see it disintegrate into nothingness, that is an indication of overwhelming despair.

Despite the vividness and insistence of his depiction of Chimbote's confusion, there is some evidence to suggest that Arguedas' despair, and his deepest fears, are inspired not by a vision of postmodern disorder, but by two alternative, contradictory visions of a different kind of order, each of which is more menacing than the idea of mere chaos. The first is the prospect of an entirely new system, imposed from without and utterly alien to what remains of the cultural values of Peru. In an interview with Chester Christian, Arguedas reveals his fear that not only Peru's future, but that of all Latin America, is

un cuadro sumamente trágico, casi determinista . . . que la América Latina [está] metida en una trampa, que el mundo en Latinoamérica no hace sino lo que los grandes poderes desean que se haga . . . que la forma de vida al modo norteamericano, aparentemente [es] el que al fin y al cabo [va] a imponerse de manera inevitable. (233)

[an extremely tragic, almost deterministic, picture: that Latin America has fallen into a trap, that the Latin American world does only what the great powers want it to do, that the North American way of life is the one that will ultimately and inevitably impose itself on us].

Even though a little later in the same interview Arguedas expresses hope that Latin America will be able to make use of North American technology and knowhow "[sin] convertir al ser humano en un ser tan excesivamente administrado, excesivamente cuantificado como los norteamericanos" [without turning human beings into beings as overly managed and quantified as North Americans] (233), the passion and intensity of his earlier words betray a real sense of foreboding about what he seems certain will come to pass.

The second prospect is suggested by César Caviedes, a geographer who studied the relationship between Arguedas' fictional representation of Chimbote and the physical reality of the city, and who offers the provocative suggestion that Arguedas intuitively foresaw an event that took place, entirely unexpectedly, three years after his death. In 1972, due to the changes in climate and water temperature brought about by an El Niño phenomenon, the anchovies that constituted the raw material of the fishmeal industry were decimated, the factories closed, and Chimbote, almost overnight, became a ghost town (Caviedes 74). In describing the effects of the closing of the fishmeal factories, Caviedes evokes a powerful scene from Los zorros in which the inhabitants of a Chimbote slum, told by the authorities that the land they have been using

as a cemetery has been expropriated, pull the crosses from the graves and, in a silent procession, carry them to what will be the site of a new cemetery (62-63). When the fisheries closed, Caviedes writes,

the boom existence of Chimbote came to an end-- but the serranos kept on descending to this huge ghost city, as if by some lemming-like instinct, and the mythical encounter of the races of Peru finished up in a cemetery as barren as the one of La Esperanza Alta. (74-75)

While the filth, stench, and squalor of Chimbote inspire disgust, while the din of mutually incomprehensible languages, the aimless wandering, and the absence of any sense of center or foundation inspire panic, there is, nevertheless, in the midst of the infernal chaos, a spark of affirmation in the simple fact that life somehow manages to endure. It is just possible, therefore, that Arguedas' very real despair comes, not from contemplating the vibrant disorder of the city, but from envisioning the prospect of an artificial, lifeless order imposed from outside, or an orderly, lemming-like march to oblivion.

CHAPTER FIVE

REDISCOVERING ORDER IN LITUMA EN LOS ANDES

Critics tend to regard Lituma en los Andes, rather dismissively, as one more literary *apologia* for Vargas Llosa's move to the political right, a move that first became evident in La guerra del fin del mundo [The War of the End of the World] (1981), and was given full-blown expression in Historia de Mayta [The Real Life of Alejandro Mayta] (1984). According to this view, Vargas Llosa made an abrupt shift from an idealistic socialism that included enthusiastic support of the Cuban Revolution,¹ to a position of what is generally called *neoliberalismo* in Latin America and *neoconservatism* in the United States. M. Keith Booker describes Vargas Llosa's current political position as

An opposition to fanaticism of any kind, a thoroughgoing skepticism about Utopian and apocalyptic visions of history that is related to a view of history as proceeding by evolution rather than revolution, and a similar skepticism toward absolutes of all kinds. (183)

The affinities with at least some versions of postmodernism are obvious, if one excludes the evolutionary view of

¹ Vargas Llosa's disenchantment with the Cuban experiment is generally attributed to his public dismay over censorship and other violations of free expression, especially the imprisonment of writers critical of the Castro regime.

history, though Efraín Kristal adds another distinction in what he sees as Vargas Llosa's abiding faith in the value of literature as a non-violent means of expressing discontent with the world (xii). What has undergone a radical change, says Kristal, is Vargas Llosa's assessment of the causes of that discontent:

If in his socialist period Vargas Llosa believed that man's feelings of dissatisfaction with his social world resulted from the nature of capitalism itself, in his neoliberal period Vargas Llosa believes that dissatisfaction results from the human condition. (Temptation of the Word xiv)

I argue, however, that the shift from idealism to skepticism was neither as abrupt nor as radical as is commonly claimed. Even during his socialist period, Vargas Llosa's novels reveal a suspicion of utopian projects, along with a more general, underlying pessimism regarding what can only be called human nature. In La casa verde, as we have seen, and in other early works, including La ciudad y los perros [Time of the Hero] (1963), Conversación en La Catedral [Conversation in the Cathedral] (1969), and even La tía Julia y el escribidor [Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter] (1977), no plan, dream, or ambition is ever realized, and even the most well-intentioned projects invariably end up causing harm. In a discussion of this phenomenon of unintended consequences, Vargas Llosa cites

as an example the source of the episode, in La casa verde, of the nuns of Santa María de Nieva who forcibly remove young Indian girls from their environment in order to educate and catechize them:

Que con las mejores intenciones del mundo y a costa de sacrificio ilimitado se pudiera causar tanto daño es una lección que tengo siempre presente. Ella me ha enseñado lo escurridiza que es la línea que separa el bien y el mal, la prudencia que hace falta para juzgar las acciones humanas y para decidir las soluciones a los problemas sociales si se quiere evitar que los remedios resulten más nocivos que la enfermedad. ("El país de las mil caras." Desafíos a la libertad 246)

[That with the best intentions in the world and at the cost of unlimited sacrifice such harm could be done is a lesson that has stayed with me. From it I have learned that the line separating good from evil is constantly shifting, and that one must exercise great prudence in judging human actions and deciding on solutions to social problems so that the remedy doesn't prove to be more deadly than the disease].

For Vargas Llosa, human suffering is not the product of a particular social or political system, but flows from diffuse, undefined, mysterious sources. What Kristal sees as a recurring theme, in the early novels, of "the ability of a corrupt society to neutralize rebellion" (Temptation of the Word 15) is not, as he implies, a critique merely of capitalism, but the expression of a darker vision of a state of corruption that exists in every society, everywhere, in every age. Time and time again, in novels,

essays, and interviews, Vargas Llosa reiterates his belief in a powerful streak of irrationality--what he calls "demons"--that insinuates itself into every human endeavor and usually succeeds in undermining it. From this perspective, then, it becomes clear that Vargas Llosa's move to the political Right is not a fundamental philosophical shift at all, but rather an effort to render his public, political statements and actions--his external self, as it were--more consistent with the internal, personal convictions he has long expressed, in a more subtle manner, in his fiction.

It is important to point out that Vargas Llosa has long held that fiction should not be used as a vehicle for political propaganda, or as the means to promote a particular political view, and has openly criticized writers who use it as such. In A Writer's Reality he insists that

if you want to make a political statement, it is much better to write an essay or article or deliver a lecture than to use a genre like the novel, which was created not to convey objective statements but instead to present an illusory feeling of reality. (144)

Ironically, he is himself an example of a writer whose work tends to receive favorable or unfavorable reviews according to the extent to which his political views coincide with those of the reviewer. Kristal notes that after Vargas

Llosa's well-publicized break with socialism over the issue of human rights violations in Cuba, he was at first "condemned for counterrevolutionary behavior. Soon after he was scorned for his literary ideas, and finally he was criticized for the 'reactionary' content of his novels" (Temptation of the Word 72). Compounding the irony, writes Kristal, is the fact that

the same critics regarded the same novels as great contributions to literature when their author was in good standing with the Cuban regime but products of bourgeois ideology when he had fallen from grace. (79)

Of course, politics is everywhere in Vargas Llosa's fiction, despite the fact that he eschews overt statements of his views. For this reason, two political events that took place in the 1980s and early 90s must be taken into consideration in any discussion of Lituma en los Andes, as they had a profound effect on Vargas Llosa's thought, and are unmistakably present as important components of the "illusory feeling of reality" of the novel.

The first occurred in 1983, at the height of the Sendero Luminoso terrorist activity. A group of eight journalists from Lima, sent to the remote Andean village of Uchuraccay to report on how the indigenous population was coping with violence from both terrorists and anti-terrorist government forces, was brutally attacked by the

villagers. All eight were stoned or beaten to death.² The national Left press blamed the massacre on government troops disguised as peasants, and, in order to defuse a volatile political situation, then-President Fernando Belaunde Terry appointed a special commission to investigate the incident. After months of exhaustive research, the commission, of which Vargas Llosa was a prominent member, concluded that the villagers had committed the murders on their own initiative, not under orders or influence of the government, but out of irrational impulses fueled by fear and confusion. Subsequently, in numerous articles and interviews for the national and international press, Vargas Llosa emphasized the element of irrationality, which in his opinion could be explained in part, but only in part, by the villagers' panic and disorientation at being caught between violent forces they did not understand. In one interview, for example, Vargas Llosa comments that "lo más escalofriante . . . es que ni siquiera los protagonistas--víctimas o autores--de la tragedia han sido totalmente conscientes de

²For a detailed account of the incident and its aftermath, see Mario Vargas Llosa, Contra viento y marea, vol. III (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1990); specifically, the essays and interviews "Informe sobre Uchuraccay" (87-128), "El terrorismo en Ayacucho" (129-40), and "Después del informe" (141-55).

lo que estaba ocurriendo" [the most chilling thing is that none of the protagonists--victims or perpetrators--of the tragedy were totally conscious of what was happening] ("El terrorismo en Ayacucho." Contra viento y marea III; 133). Similarly, in an open letter to the families of the victims, he writes:

[E]sos hombres y mujeres de Uchuraccay . . . mueren y matan por razones que ni siquiera acaban de entender. . . . [H]an perdido la brújula y no están en condiciones de discernir ni siquiera . . . con quién aliarse para no ser exterminados. ("Carta a unos familiares de luto." Contra viento y marea III; 203-04)

The Left scoffed at the commission's findings and vilified Vargas Llosa, even to the point of accusing him of complicity in a government-backed coverup. Vargas Llosa responded by defending his position and that of the commission, and by denouncing more vehemently than ever the utopianism that, in his view, initiated the chain of events that culminated in the Uchuraccay massacre. He states in one interview that the *senderistas* "han declarado la guerra y están aplicando el terrorismo . . . [porque] se consideran con derecho a matar en nombre de una utopía" [have declared war and are using terrorism because they consider themselves to have the right to kill in the name of a utopia] ("El terrorismo en Ayacucho" 136). In another, he expresses dismay that

la persona que está absolutamente segura de su verdad puede aplicar la violencia con absoluta frialdad. . . . [Los senderistas] se consideran poseedores de la verdad absoluta y actúan en consecuencia. ("Después del informe." Contra viento y marea III; 152)

[the person who is absolutely sure of his or her truth can resort to violence with complete cold-bloodedness. The *senderistas* believe that they possess the absolute truth, and their activities are a consequence of that belief].

Vargas Llosa continues to profess his faith in the democratic system, and insists that "[l]a lucha por defender la democracia en mi país--cosa distinta de defender al gobierno--es algo que, en efecto, estoy empeñado" [I am determined to fight to defend democracy in my country--which is not the same thing as defending the government] ("Contra los estereotipos." Contra viento y marea III; 218), and considers it the only system under which painful truths such as that of the Uchuraccay murders can be revealed:

[Una democracia], a diferencia de un sistema totalitario, permite . . . que un hecho así pueda ser esclarecido, que se investigue, que se muestren las responsabilidades, sean de quienes fueran. ("Después del informe" 144)

[A democracy, unlike a totalitarian system, allows a matter such as this to be brought to light and investigated, so that the responsible parties, no matter who they might be, are exposed].

At the same time, however, he fears that in the attempt to stamp out terrorism Peru's fragile democracy will be

sacrificed: "Socavar internamente la democracia para defenderla es tan peligroso como atacarla desde afuera."

[It is as dangerous to undermine democracy from within in order to defend it as it is to attack it from without]

("Después del informe" 148). Furthermore, he sees the manipulation of truth for political reasons as a legacy that predates the Conquest:

[L]os incas practicaron la manipulación del pasado en función de las necesidades políticas del presente . . . [así que] es imposible reconstruir esta historia tan borgianamente tergiversada. ("El país de las mil caras" 231-32)

[The Incas manipulated the past in order to meet the political needs of the present, so that it is impossible to reconstruct a history with such Borgesian twists].

The difficulty of ever doing away with such an ingrained practice leads Vargas Llosa to reconsider the fundamental issue of whether truth can be found amidst the relativism, not only of the postmodern world, but of the modern and premodern worlds as well.

The second event, some aspects of which were an outgrowth of the first, was Vargas Llosa's defeat in the 1990 Peruvian presidential election. He ran as a neoliberal and, in part because of his position on the Uchuraccay incident, was considered untrustworthy by Left and liberal voters. The populist candidate Alberto

Fujimori won by a wide margin, and a short time after taking office staged what was dubbed an *autogolpe* [autocoup], disbanding Congress and the Supreme Court, and governing by decree. His dictatorial style of government won overwhelming popular approval, however, primarily because of the damage he inflicted on the Sendero Luminoso by having its leader, Abimael Guzmán, arrested and imprisoned without a legitimate trial. Two days after the election, Vargas Llosa left Peru definitively, vowing never to write about Peruvian politics again, but later broke his vow in order to express his shock and disgust at Fujimori's *autogolpe* and at the public's support of it:

Desde que salí del Perú . . . me prometí no volver a opinar sobre política peruana. . . . Rompo ahora aquella promesa para dejar constancia de mi condena a lo que me parece un crimen contra una de las pocas cosas buenas que le quedaron al Perú--la libertad--y de la tristeza y la vergüenza que me da saber . . . que el autor del crimen tiene tantos cómplices. ("Regreso a la barbarie." Desafíos a la libertad 116-17)

[When I left Peru, I promised myself never again to express my opinions about Peruvian politics. I am now breaking that promise in order to place on record my condemnation of what seems to me to be a crime against one of the few good things left in Peru--freedom--and to attest to the sadness and shame I feel at the knowledge that the perpetrator of the crime has so many accomplices].

He persists in his belief that even a flawed democracy is preferable to authoritarian rule: "No hay que confundir

desafecto por instituciones defectuosas de la democracia con entusiasmo por la dictadura." [One must not confuse opposition to defective democratic institutions with enthusiasm for dictatorship] ("Regreso a la barbarie" 114), and rejects the concept of moral relativism:

Dentro de los límites de la moral . . . [es necesario] que quede claro en todo momento que entre los dos ideales en pugna hay uno más humano y más digno que el otro. ("El Perú en llamas." Desafíos a la libertad 44)

[Within the realm of morality, it must be made clear at all times that of the two ideals in competition, one is more humane and more worthy than the other].

Above all, he expresses a growing fear that the atrocities committed by the Sendero Luminoso, as well as the Fujimori government's flouting of democratic principles, signal a return to barbarism:

Es el triunfo de lo irracional, el retorno a ese estadio primario de salvajismo del que el hombre partió, hace millones de años, a conquistar la razón, el sentido común, los valores primordiales de la supervivencia y la convivencia, en una palabra, a humanizarse. ("Violencia y ficción." Desafíos a la libertad 144)

[It is the triumph of the irrational, the return to that primary, savage state that man left behind millions of years ago, in order to conquer reason, common sense, the primordial values of survival and coexistence; in a word, to become human].

He cites the Lebanese poet Georges Schéhadé for confirmation of his increasing suspicion that laws,

morality, and all the trappings of civilization no longer have the power to withstand the chaos that is erupting everywhere:

No reconozco nada ni entiendo ya nada de lo que pasa . . . salvo que la civilización es una delgadísima película que en cualquier momento se puede quebrar. (Quoted in "Violencia y ficción" 142)

[I no longer recognize or understand anything that is happening, except that civilization is the thinnest of films that at any moment might tear apart].

These suspicions, and the despair that they generate, are key elements of Lituma en los Andes, a novel that demonstrates Vargas Llosa's conviction that "[n]ada parece ser imposible en la historia moderna convertida poco menos que en ramal de la literatura fantástica" [nothing seems impossible in modern history, which has become little more than a branch of fantasy literature] ("Violencia y ficción" 146).

It comes as no surprise that Vargas Llosa's by now familiar theme of hatred of fanaticism and irrationality is restated in Lituma en los Andes; however, the novel develops the theme more fully, leads it in an entirely new direction, and adds to it a darker, more frightening dimension than ever before. There appears in Lituma en los Andes a growing awareness that irrational violence is ubiquitous and universal, along with a growing skepticism

about the possibility of controlling it. According to
Kristal, Vargas Llosa

insists on human irrationality and inclination
towards fanaticism, but he offers little or no
insight into the motivation of his characters
because he is ultimately convinced that there is
nothing to explain, that no explanation can shed
light on their dark, internal world. (Temptation
of the Word 139)

In addition, there is a blurring of the distinction between
victimizer and victim, between oppressor and oppressed,
that leads to the suggestion that we are all accomplices in
the propagation of an endless cycle of violence. In one of
his more controversial essays, Vargas Llosa makes this
point in the context of the conquest of the New World:

Academics have been itemizing every single crime
committed by Europeans with remarkable
meticulousness, but they have not shed a single
tear for the thousands, the hundreds of
thousands, perhaps millions of Indian men and
women who were sacrificed in wars of conquest and
in barbarous Inca, Maya, Aztec, Chipcha, or
Tolteca ceremonies. ("The Disputed Legacy of
Christopher Columbus," quoted in Kristal,
Temptation of the Word 235n7)³

The cruelty inherent in the cultures of both the Old and
New Worlds, and the suspicion of universal barbarism lying
just beneath the surface of what we call civilization, are
significant themes in Lituma en los Andes.

³The essay originally appeared in Bostonia (summer 1992):
47.

Another, related theme that appears throughout Vargas Llosa's work is the idea that storytelling is itself an irrational act, but one that is necessary for survival. In Kristal's view, Vargas Llosa believes that

the irrational forces responsible for literary creation offer a kind of escape valve for our most dangerous drives. . . . [Through] uncensored literary activity . . . the transformations of lived experience by the workings of fantasy can serve as palliatives to the desires and inclinations that can threaten social coexistence. (Temptation of the Word 119, 120-21).

In more general terms, but with specific reference to the protagonists of Lituma en los Andes, Raymond Williams writes that for Vargas Llosa, "el acto de contar funciona no solamente como entretenimiento, sino como una forma de sobrevivir ante la amenaza constante de la muerte" [the act of storytelling serves not only as entertainment, but as a means of survival in the face of the constant threat of death] (149-50).

I argue, however, that a close examination of the text reveals that in Lituma en los Andes the act of storytelling is not as benign as it appears, and that it creates the illusion of providing a harmless outlet for destructive impulses while it in fact abets those impulses by drawing attention away from them. Furthermore, I suggest that

complicity is not limited to the creator of stories, but extends to the listener--and the reader--as well.

Kristal observes that in Lituma en los Andes "[f]or the first time the violent instincts of some characters no longer have any rational explanation whatsoever; violence just happens," and speculates that Vargas Llosa might be contemplating a new, possibly religious vision, as a means of confronting the violence (Temptation of the Word 187). I suspect that he may be right, but add the suggestion that the vision Vargas Llosa offers in Lituma en los Andes is already a religious one, albeit one that offers neither redemption nor comfort. Vargas Llosa is no longer concerned with postmodern disorder, relativism, or the meaninglessness that results from the conflict of multiple meanings. In the world of Lituma en los Andes, postmodern chaos is as artificial as the simulacrum of order provided by modern civilization: beneath them both is a deeper order based on immutable, perhaps divine laws too frightening to contemplate directly, but to which he makes oblique reference in the novel's epigraph, from William Blake's "The Ghost of Abel":

Cain's City built with Human Blood,
Not blood of Bulls and Goats.⁴

⁴The complete passage reads as follows:

The plot of Lituma en los Andes recalls that of ¿Quién mató a Palomino Molero? [Who Killed Palomino Molero?] (1986) in that it involves a criminal investigation by the ubiquitous soldier and everyman Lituma, and has what is considered to be a shocking *dénouement*. In this case, the seemingly laberynthine mystery takes place in the remote Andean village of Naccos, and concerns the disappearance of three men. The initial suspects are the Sendero Luminoso terrorists, who are responsible for several attacks in the region; however, Lituma is surprised (as is, presumably, the reader) to discover that the men were killed not by the *senderistas*, but by the people of Naccos, in a ritual of human sacrifice and cannibalism meant to appease the ancient Andean spirits. The aesthetic pleasure of reading Lituma en los Andes comes, according to Raymond Williams, from the perception of a pattern that gradually takes shape from apparently unconnected threads (145).⁵

I will have Human blood, and not the blood of bulls or goats, and no atonement, O Jehova! The Elohim live on Sacrifice of Men: hence I am God of Men! Thou human, O Jehova! By the rock and the oak of the Druid, creeping mistletoe, and thorn, Cain's city built with human blood, not blood of bulls and goats, Thou shalt Thyself be sacrificed to Me, thy God! On Calvary. (Johnson and Grant 362-63)

⁵Williams cites Wayne Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1961) 125-33, for this observation.

Two objections can be made to this interpretation, however. First, the cause of the men's disappearance is never a complete mystery, certainly not to the reader, and not even to the relatively obtuse Lituma, since Adriana, in her initial interview with him, drops the broadest of hints about their fate. She tells him, for example, that she read Demetrio Chanca's palm just prior to his disappearance:

Le dije lo que vi. Que lo iban a sacrificar para aplacar a los malignos que tanto daño causan en la zona. Y que lo habían escogido a él porque era impuro. (Lituma en los Andes 41)⁶

[I told him what I saw. That he was going to be sacrificed to placate the evil spirits that do so much harm in the region. And that he had been chosen because he was impure].

Later in the same interview, she adds that the gods are no longer content with the Indians' traditional offerings:

Esos montoncitos de piedras, esas florecitas, esos animalitos, no sirven para nada. . . . A ellos lo que les gusta es el humano. (45)

[Those little heaps of stones, those flowers, those animals, do no good at all. What they like are humans].

Second, the pattern that appears to emerge from the revelation at the end of the novel is no pattern at all, but merely the illusion of a pattern that immediately fades

⁶Subsequent references to the novel will be by page number or, for purposes of clarification, by the initials LA.

away, so that the explanation of the deaths clarifies nothing. Paradoxically, as we shall see, the mystery that is no mystery culminates in a deeper mystery, one that is dark and profoundly disturbing.

The novel's resonances with Western mythology, particularly with the myth of Dionysus, are obvious and heavy-handed for a writer of Vargas Llosa's subtlety, so much so, in fact, that they invite suspicion about his intentions. The drunken tavernkeeper and wine merchant Dionisio, who has no known father and whose mother was killed by a lightning bolt, is famous for having introduced *pisco* into the Andean region previously unfamiliar with the grape. He is androgynous in appearance, lascivious and indiscriminate in his sexual tastes. He once had a following of half-mad women notorious for their violent excesses, and it is even rumored that he died and returned from the dead. For Lituma, Dionisio represents danger: "Donde aparece ese tipo, todo es degeneración y sangre." [Wherever that guy appears, there is nothing but degeneracy and blood] (200), yet he acknowledges, along with the townspeople, that "[s]in él, no hay fiesta" [without him, there is no celebration] (244).

Dionisio also has some qualities associated with Andean deities, however. He encourages drunkenness as a

means of freeing oneself from the limitations of human rationality and "visiting one's animal" (229, 242), and on several occasions, in a semi-drunken state, simulates the movements of the *ukuku*, a bear or bearlike spirit. At one point, he actually takes on the appearance of the animal, a transformation that recalls that of the foxes in El zorro de arriba y el zorro de abajo:

Tenía la cara más abotagada que de costumbre y . . . sus cachetes regordetes lucían bajo los puntos de barba un brillo rosáceo. Estaba más grande y blando que otras veces y sus extremidades, sus hombros, sus huesos, parecían descolgados. (227)

[His face was puffier than usual and his chubby cheeks shone with a pinkish glow beneath his scrubby beard. He looked bigger and softer than at other times, and his extremities, his shoulders, his bones, seemed to hang from him loosely].

As Kristal has pointed out, Adriana, the name of Dionisio's witchlike wife, is clearly an anagram of Ariadne (*Ariadna* in Spanish),⁷ and the association between Naccos and Naxos is equally transparent (Temptation of the Word 193).

What is one to make of these connections? For Vargas Llosa's detractors, the temptation is to regard the link between Dionysian excesses and Indian practices as evidence that he considers Peru's indigenous population to consist

⁷Her name is the same as that of her counterpart in ¿Quién mató a Palomino Molero?, and the two Adrianas have about them a seductive quality despite their ugliness.

of irrational savages impervious to the demands for moderation and self-control imposed by civilization. However, the heavy-handedness of the associations suggests that the reader is being set up for ironies that the characters fail to notice, and reinforces the notion of irrational violence as a fundamental, inescapable law common to both "barbaric" and "civilized" societies.

Taken separately, the individual ironies appear trivial. Lituma, for example, expresses nostalgia for his native city of Piura,

por su clima candente, sus gentes extrovertidas que no sabían guardar secretos . . . [por] una tierra que . . . vivía en su memoria como un paraíso perdido. (177)

[for its sultry climate, its outgoing people who didn't know how to keep secrets, for a land that lived in his memory like a lost paradise].

This "paraíso perdido" is, of course, the site of the violence, suffering, and exploitation recounted in La casa verde, in which Lituma plays a major role. More importantly, it is a place filled with all sorts of mysteries, not the least of which has to do with Mercedes, the young woman Lituma thinks he remembers as "Meche" from the Piuran brothel, and who "sabe guardar secretos" as well as anyone in Naccos. The irony is compounded when, in the same conversation, the Danish ethnologist Stirmsson explains his own fascination with Peru:

Es un país que no hay quien entienda. . . . Y no hay nada más atractivo que lo indescifrable para gente de países claros y transparentes como el mío. (179)

[It's a country that no one understands. And there's nothing more attractive than something indecipherable for people from clear, transparent countries like mine].

His words would be less remarkable, perhaps, if not for the fact that they immediately follow his account of an incident that took place in his own country:

Ahí en Odense, cerca del barrio en que yo vivo, una secta de satanistas asesinó a un anciano clavándole alfileres, como ofrenda a Belcebú. . . . Claro que eran unas bestias. (177-78)

[There in Odense, near the neighborhood where I live, members of a Satanist cult murdered an old man by sticking needles into him, as an offering to Beelzebub. Of course, they were beasts].

Utterly blind to the significance of what only recently transpired in his "clear, transparent" country, Stirrsson nevertheless presumes to pass judgment on past civilizations:

¿Algún pueblo de la antigüedad pasaría el examen? ¿Cuál no fue cruel e intolerante, juzgado desde la perspectiva de ahora? (178)

[Would any ancient people pass the test? Which of them wouldn't be judged cruel and intolerant from today's perspective?]

Like Lituma, Stirrsson fails to grasp the irony of his words, and it is left to another member of the group, an engineer not normally given to reflection, to wonder

si lo que pasa en el Perú no es una resurrección de toda esa violencia empozada. Como si hubiera estado escondida en alguna parte y, de repente, por alguna razón, saliera de nuevo a la superficie. (178)

[if what is happening in Peru isn't a resurrection of all that buried violence. It's as if it had been hidden away somewhere and suddenly, for some reason, has risen to the surface again].

Eventually, even Lituma begins to wonder if there does indeed exist a pattern within the pervasive violence, an order not discernible through reason, but accessible only to those like Dionisio and Adriana, who seem to be in direct communication with darker forces:

Es como si ese par de salvajes estuvieran teniendo razón y los civilizados no. Saber leer y escribir, usar saco y corbata, haber ido a la escuela y vivido en la ciudad, ya no sirve. Sólo los brujos entienden lo que pasa. (188-89)

[It's as if that pair of savages were on the right track and civilized people weren't. It does no good anymore to know how to read and write, to wear a coat and tie, to have gone to school and lived in the city. Only the witches know what's going on].

He does not allow himself to pursue the question, however, so that what might have led to an important insight into the fundamental laws governing the world remains nothing more than a fleeting glimpse.

Even more disturbing than the suggestion that the violence in Naccos obeys the laws of a terrible order is the evidence of a widespread complicity in that violence, a

complicity that is not limited to the inhabitants of Naccos, but extends to Lituma and his adjutant Carreño. The latter, a Quechua-speaking Indian from Cuzco, has an open, frank, friendly nature, although Lituma notes that he is inclined to sentimentality and melancholy (13). The harshness of his initiation into the ways of life in the city and the military has not succeeded in dampening his enthusiasm for, and at least partial faith in, traditional Indian beliefs; on the contrary, it strengthens them, in part by demonstrating to him that even what are considered the most barbaric practices of his people are no more cruel or irrational than what takes place under the auspices of civilization. On one occasion he tells Lituma: "Yo me creo cualquier cosa. . . . A mí la vida me ha vuelto el hombre más crédulo del mundo." [I'll believe anything. Life has turned me into the most credulous man in the world] (47), and later reminds him: "Ya le dije que, como van las cosas, estoy dispuesto a creer en lo que me pongan delante." [I've already told you that, the way things are going, I'm willing to believe anything that is put in front of me] (68). Lituma, who confesses to a deep dislike of Indians, nevertheless trusts and confides in Carreño, although he acknowledges that "[t]ambién Tomasito tenía su misterio" [there was a mystery about Tomasito as well] (106).

That there is indeed a mysterious dimension to the almost too open and affable young man is illustrated by a brief, seemingly minor exchange between Carreño and Lituma, in which the corporal half-jokingly accuses his adjutant of being behind the disappearances they are in the process of investigating:

--¿No los habrás hecho desaparecer tú a esos tres, Tomasito?

--Quién sabe, mi cabo.

Terminaron riéndose, nerviosos y con unas risitas insinceras. (145)

["Could you be the one who made those three disappear, Tomasito?"

"Who knows, Corporal."

They ended up laughing nervously, and their laughter was insincere].

It is an oddly chilling little scene that apparently makes no lasting impression on Lituma, but which nevertheless furnishes the first of many threads of evidence that weave Carreño into the web of complicity surrounding the events in Naccos.

An additional thread emerges from the implications of Carreño's twofold loss of innocence. He has quite literally lost his virginity to Mercedes, and has lost her as well after having fallen hopelessly in love with her and having killed a man for her sake. Furthermore, he has witnessed, and perhaps been an unwilling participant in, the torture of the truly innocent mute Pedrito Tinoco, and

experience he describes as "mi desvirgada. . . . Después de eso, no me asusta ni me apena nada. Ya me encallecí, como todos" [my deflowering. Since then, I'm not afraid or ashamed of anything. I've become calloused, like everyone else] (70). Inured to violence, with blood on his hands already, and willing to go to any length to win Mercedes back, he might easily, one imagines, proceed to the next step of seeking help from the bloodthirsty *apus* in which he admittedly half-believes, and to do whatever is necessary to secure their favor. Significantly, of all the characters in the novel, Carreño is the only one who knows exactly what he wants from life and succeeds in getting it. In fact, his reunion with Mercedes, which Adriana correctly predicts (141), is one of the few successful enterprises to be found in all of Vargas Llosa's fiction.

When viewed in this light, the "happy ending" to Lituma en los Andes that has puzzled and annoyed numerous reviewers and critics is not so puzzling after all. It is not, as Michael Wood complains, a weakness in the narrative that comes from an attempt to

[make] everything tidy, as if Vargas Llosa thought his readers couldn't bear too much mystery or unhappiness, and as if horror could only be swallowed with a little coating of romance. (17)

Neither does it merely serve to illustrate what Steven Kellman sees as Vargas Llosa's conviction that "passion is as indecipherable a mystery as violence" (123). The story of Carreño and Mercedes is absolutely integral to the novel, as is, most importantly, Carreño's nightly telling of installments of that story to Lituma, for it is through the act of narrating, and of listening to the narrative, that the complicity of both men in the events of Naccos is finally and unmistakably revealed.

Pedrito Tinoco disappears after the two, not wanting to interrupt Carreño's storytelling, send him to Dionisio's tavern to buy beer. It is Carreño, in fact, who orders him to go, and when the mute arrives at the tavern Adriana tells the crowd gathered there, "se lo han mandado" [they've sent him to you] (263). In retrospect, Lituma experiences remorse at not having noticed Pedrito's failure to return, and attributes his inattention to his absorption in Carreño's tale:

[E]n vez de bajar a ver por qué no volvía, yo y Tomasito . . . estaríamos conversando sobre la mujer que lo dejó, seguramente. Fuimos cómplices también. No invencioneros ni incitadores. . . . Pero cómplices por omisión, sí lo fuimos, en cierta forma. (263)

[Instead of going to see why he hadn't returned, Tomasito and I must surely have been talking about the woman who left him. We were accomplices, too. Not instigators or inciters, but we were accomplices by omission, in a way].

He does not pursue the connection further, nor does it occur to him that Carreño's involvement might go beyond mere negligence. He misses, or perhaps deliberately avoids, the obvious because it is too horrible to contemplate, and misses it yet again when, in an apparently idle conversation, he sums up Carreño's life story:

¿Sabes una cosa, Tomasito? Me has contado toda tu vida. Ya me sé el resto. Fuiste a Andahuaylas . . . te mutaron aquí, *te trajiste a Pedrito Tinoco*, nos conocimos. (281-82; emphasis added)

[You know something, Tomasito? You've told me your whole life story. I already know the rest. You went to Andahuaylas, you were transferred here, *you brought Pedrito Tinoco with you*, we met each other].

In spite of his deliberate blindness regarding Carreño's role in the disappearances, the revelation about human sacrifice and cannibalism that takes place in the epilogue comes as no surprise to Lituma, and he says merely: "Me arrepiento de haberme entercado tanto en lo que les pasó a esos. Mejor me quedaba sospechando." [I'm sorry I insisted on finding out what happened to those people. It would have been better if I had just kept on suspecting] (312). The revelation is even less of a surprise to the reader, and in fact seems somewhat staged, not to mention anticlimactic. However, the predictable horror of the *dénouement* serves to draw attention away from a more subtle

horror suggested by some puzzling anachronisms that appear briefly, in an almost offhand manner, and which have been noted, also briefly, by Kristal (Temptation of the Word 236n7).

As the investigation in Naccos draws to a close, Lituma learns that he has been promoted to sergeant and assigned to Santa María de Nieva, a jungle outpost of which he has never heard (292). Of course, Santa María de Nieva, which figures prominently in La casa verde, is the site of the beginning of the chain of events leading to Lituma's demotion and banishment to the Andes. Significantly, it is in Santa María de Nieva where Lituma, who generally plays the part of marginal observer, takes an active role in events, and, out of blindness and ignorance, makes of the innocent Indian girl Bonifacia a kind of sacrificial victim. Carreño, for his part, is transferred to Lituma's home city of Piura, the home also of Mercedes, who presumably will accompany him, and who has been--or will be--exploited there, along with Bonifacia, as a prostitute in La Casa Verde. The cycle of suffering, it seems, is complete.

By now it is clear that the violence that pervades Lituma en los Andes is not a product of postmodern relativism or conflicting values, nor is it indicative of

chaos. On the contrary, it is the foundation upon which rests an implacable order that transcends time and place, and which is of a cyclical nature that makes it impossible to escape. Those like Lituma, who attempt to persuade themselves that they are innocent by feigning ignorance of the underlying horror, succeed only in exposing themselves as cowards and weaklings. Adriana might as well be addressing Lituma directly when she says:

Sólo la decadencia, como la de este tiempo, se da gratis. Ustedes no tienen que pagar nada a nadie por vivir inseguros y miedosos y ser las ruinas que son. Eso se da de balde. (272)

[Only decadence, like that of today, is free. You don't have to pay anyone anything to live like the insecure, frightened wrecks that you are. You get that for nothing].

Those who are fully alive are those like Carreño, who understand that violence "representa la verdadera vida, la que vale la pena" [represents real life, the life that is worth living], and that even the unspeakable acts committed in Naccos are preferable to "la seguridad [que] es el aburrimiento . . . la imbecilidad . . . la muerte" [the safety that is boredom, imbecility, death] (270). Because he chooses what he thinks is safety, Lituma will continue to live on the margin, alienated and vaguely perplexed, with a vague sense of guilt over the complicity he refuses to recognize. Carreño, on the other hand, because he

accepts responsibility for his part in the violence, is able to "[sufrir] y [gozar] en abundancia, como debe ser" [suffer and enjoy abundantly, as is right and proper] (271). His complicity in the violence is ultimately neither greater nor less than that of Lituma; however, his acceptance of it on a personal level, coupled with his awareness that it is an essential component of the underlying order of things, sets him free.

CHAPTER SIX

FROM THE POSTMODERN CONDITION TO THE HUMAN CONDITION

In the novels discussed in this study, José María Arguedas and Mario Vargas Llosa explore a number of familiar postmodern issues that they consider particularly relevant to the Latin American, and more specifically, to the Peruvian, experience. Among them are the intermingling of modern and premodern cultural elements that Juan Poblete calls *heterogeneidad multitemporal* (123), and a similar intermingling of the rural and the urban in various stages of transculturation. Closely related issues include the replacement of the notion of linear progress by an awareness of the simultaneous existence of various degrees of *civilización* and *barbarie*, and the blurring of the distinction between center and margin. Simultaneous existence does not imply peaceful coexistence, however; on the contrary, the interminglings and juxtapositions have, with few exceptions, been marked by fierce clashes resulting in an unbearably tense situation that continually threatens to deteriorate into generalized violence and chaos.

Textual evidence from the novels indicates that both Arguedas and Vargas Llosa understand that the situation

cries out to be resolved, yet know from observation and experience that every attempt to integrate the fragmented world of postmodern Latin America has ended in failure. In addition, the texts reveal a growing awareness on the part of both writers that the condition they address is neither exclusively postmodern nor confined to Latin America.

Fragmentation brought about by cultural and temporal heterogeneity has been part of the Latin American landscape at least since the Conquest, and probably long prior to it, while resonances with other, often remote, sites and epochs hint at what can only be called, however unfashionably, the human condition. When viewed as such, it is therefore to be expected that the situation should defy every effort to alter or control it, and that both Arguedas and Vargas Llosa should discover that the process of coming to terms with it is difficult, painful, and not always successful.

While both writers are engaged with the same issues, the perspective from which they view them, along with the manner by which they confront them, has evolved differently, and the differences have contributed to some widespread critical misinterpretations of both their literary works and the political positions. The conventional notion that Arguedas moved steadily to the political Left and that Vargas Llosa has moved (and is

still moving) to the Right is an oversimplification at best, and ignores the multiple crossings and convergences to be found in the thinking of two writers who coincide on some issues and diverge, sometimes radically, on others, but who in any case adhere to no clearly drawn ideological pattern. Even the deeply dissimilar political positions that influenced their by now familiar grand gestures of despair do not fit easily into a simple Left-Right dichotomy. In fact, the gestures have elements in common that transcend politics and to a certain extent render their differences inconsequential.

As we have seen, Los ríos profundos and La casa verde offer vivid portrayals of a fragmented society, along with compelling depictions of the individual human suffering that such fragmentation engenders. The novels do not, however, attempt to uncover the causes of the situation they portray, and vacillate in their approaches to possible solutions. Both Los ríos profundos and La casa verde express a somewhat tenuous faith in utopian ideals, yet at the same time flirt with the postmodern attitude of resigned acceptance of dystopia. Neither arrives at a firm position; however, despite their shared ambivalence, some important distinctions in the thinking of the two writers begin to emerge. Arguedas' adherence to the utopian ideal

wavers from time to time, but manages to survive more or less intact, while Vargas Llosa shows signs of *desengaño*, and, despite his professed utopian leanings, reveals a pessimism in his novel that will only later begin to appear in his political writings and public pronouncements.

In Todas las sangres and El hablador, attempts to cling to the belief in a fundamental order grow increasingly desperate. Both novels portray a world in which nothing coheres, where all attempts at integration are either ineffective or spurious, and where everything ultimately flies apart. Interestingly enough, in both cases there intrudes an unintended element of irony that adds power to the portrayal. Todas las sangres, widely criticized for failing to capture a coherent, global picture of Peruvian reality, paradoxically succeeds, by virtue of its very failure, in capturing the incoherence and fragmentation that characterize the nation. In the case of El hablador, it is the critics themselves who furnish the irony. By attacking the novel for failing to provide an accurate representation of one of the many indigenous worlds of Peru, they miss one of the book's outstanding points, and in so doing inadvertently underscore its success in demonstrating that an accurate

representation of these worlds is all but impossible.¹ The ambivalence manifested in Todas las sangres and El hablador is more pronounced and more troubling than ever; however, it is clear that despair has begun to set in, notwithstanding sometimes strident protestations to the contrary.

El zorro de arriba y el zorro de abajo and Lituma en los Andes are the most revelatory of the novels, and at the same time the most enigmatic. The triumph of despair seems apparent, not only in the texts themselves, but in the fact that each of the novels either immediately precedes or immediately follows its author's grand gesture of despair, and offers what can be considered to be at least a partial explanation of that gesture. It is in their attempts to elucidate the causes of despair that both Los zorros and Lituma en los Andes take a surprising turn, hinting at, but

¹ Efraín Kristal appears to represent a minority view with his insistence that El hablador

is not, nor does it pretend to be, an accurate portrayal of the Machiguengas or of the Western characters. . . . Vargas Llosa transmutes information . . . in order to establish a counterpoint between two groups of people who are culturally isolated from each other. . . . [El hablador] does not purport to document the complex historical, political, or anthropological reality of the Peruvian Indians. (Temptation of the Word 158)

never fully articulating, an entirely new vision whose lack of clarity makes it all the more disturbing.

El zorro de arriba y el zorro de abajo succeeds in depicting a world characterized by fragmentation, radical heterogeneity, multiple meanings, and conflicting values; all elements of the chaotic clamor usually associated with postmodernism. In addition, it offers occasionally brilliant portrayals of quietly heroic individuals who hold on to their dignity and retain a measure of autonomy as they learn to live without hope. At the same time, however, Arguedas undermines his own success by positing the vision of a socialist utopia in which, given the flat lifelessness of the characters he invents to serve as its mouthpieces, he does not fully believe. On the other hand, the contradictory vision of free-flowing despair is extremely powerful, and, coupled with Arguedas' own personal, irrevocable gesture of despair--his suicide--gives the lie to the revolutionary rhetoric of hope. Finally, and perhaps most significantly of all, the subtle, surprising intimation of a concrete cause for despair in the very real threat of cultural annihilation transforms the bleak, featureless postmodern landscape into a scene of tangible terror.

In Lituma en los Andes, Vargas Llosa makes patent a twofold idea that appears to some degree in all his works, but which he has never articulated in such an unequivocal fashion: that is, that inexplicable, irrational violence, present in every age, every culture, every locale, and every level of society, is the common denominator of human existence; and furthermore, that the reason and law that constitute what we consider civilization are powerless to control or even contain it. More importantly, he suggests that the violence is rooted not in anything as shallow as postmodern anarchy, but in a fundamental order, perhaps of supernatural origin. Those like Tomás Carreño, who obey its terrible laws, are rewarded, while those like Lituma, who resist or defy its power, are caught nevertheless in an endless cycle of blood and sacrifice. Unfortunately, however, Vargas Llosa's potentially astonishing vision remains little more than a glimpse, as he, like Lituma, retreats from his insight without exploring it further. As a result, Lituma en los Andes, though not technically an unfinished novel like Los zorros, ends on a tentative, inconclusive note. Vargas Llosa's personal reaction to the irrational violence he sees taking over Peru is similarly ambivalent, and his emigration echoes, with unintentional

irony, Lituma's futile attempt to escape the terrible order.

The irrevocable nature of Arguedas' retreat from his insight ensures that the nagging aftertaste of inauthenticity that permeates the ending of Los zorros will endure as a permanent feature, not only of this particular text, but of the overall body of Arguedas' work and thought. In the case of Lituma en los Andes, however, there is reason to believe that Vargas Llosa's retreat may be only temporary, a regrouping of his intellectual forces, as it were, and that Kristal is right when he speculates that "this novel suggests an important change in Vargas Llosa's literary trajectory" (Temptation of the Word xvii).

To begin to understand where this trajectory might lead, it is necessary to turn once again to the novel's epigraph:

Cain's City built with Human Blood,
Not blood of Bulls and Goats.

In "The Ghost of Abel," a short dramatic work that Blake calls a "revelation," these words are spoken by Satan, in a deliberate, malicious perversion of the Biblical admonitions against blood sacrifice (Johnson and Grant 362n5).² I suspect that, in taking his epigraph from this

² Johnson and Grant offer the following Biblical references:

text, Vargas Llosa is implying that an explanation for the bloodthirsty violence that appears to be entrenched everywhere can be found in the decidedly un-postmodern concept of evil.

"The Ghost of Abel" uses the story of Cain's fratricide to dramatize the struggle between Satan, who insists on "sacrifice on sacrifice, blood on blood", and Jehovah, who reminds the grieving Adam and Eve: "Lo, I have given you a Lamb for atonement" (362). Blake ends his drama on an enigmatic note: God's promise of redemption appears to annihilate Satan, who sinks into the abyss, yet the last voice we hear is that of Abel's ghost, crying for revenge. In their gloss of the text and Blake's accompanying illumination, Mary Johnson and John Grant write:

This drama is a revelation of the point at which history could have been redeemed at its outset. Having rejected the vicious circles of sin and punishment, violence and vengeance, Adam and Eve with Cain would have returned to Paradise. But after the curtain falls the final design shows

Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats? (Psalms 50:13)

Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. (Hebrews 9:12)

For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins. (Hebrews 10:4)

the Ghost of Abel pointing to the words "The Voice of Abel's Blood," written against the sky. (363n8)

Redemption is promised, but the battle between God and Satan is far from over, and in Vargas Llosa's view, judging from the events depicted in Lituma en los Andes, Satan appears to be winning, at least for the present.

By abandoning the notion of violence as the product of a vague postmodern malaise, by instead assigning it a concrete identity, this most pessimistic of Vargas Llosa's novels, paradoxically, opens the way for yet another concept antithetical to the postmodern view of things: the concept of hope. As we have seen, a nameless, faceless enemy is all but impossible to fight effectively; however, evil that is tangible and identifiable invites confrontation, and if it is of demonic origin the means by which it can be challenged are all the more clear. If such is indeed the nature of the evil that Vargas Llosa portrays in Lituma en los Andes and alludes to in the epigraph, the novel can be read as a radical revisitation of his old notion of *demons*. Kristal suggests as much with his previously mentioned insight that in Lituma en los Andes

[o]ne gets the sense that Vargas Llosa's demons are becoming less metaphorical and that he might embrace their literary representation with less reserve or offer a new vision, perhaps a religious one, with which to oppose them. (Temptation of the Word 187)

Just what this vision will include remains to be seen; however, if it does turn out to be religious in nature it will in all likelihood be free of anything resembling orthodoxy.

Meanwhile, in his most recent novel, Los cuadernos de don Rigoberto (1997), Vargas Llosa's characters have apparently given up trying to make sense of their sociopolitical milieu, and have retreated into the only world over which they have any control, the private utopia of eroticism. Furthermore, his protagonist, Rigoberto, vigorously and repeatedly expresses his "repugnancia moral, psicológica e ideológica, contra toda forma de servidumbre gregaria" [moral, psychological, and ideological repugnance toward every kind of gregarious servitude], his "prejuicios contra el hombre-rebaño" [prejudices against man's herd instinct] (163), and rails against

la robotización definitiva y el oscurantismo, un avance de lo planificado, lo organizado, lo obligatorio, lo rutinario, lo colectivo, y un encogimiento aún mayor de lo espontáneo, lo inspirado, lo creativo, y lo original, que sólo son concebibles en la esfera del individuo.
(164-65)

[definitive robotization and obscurantism, the rise of all that is planned, organized, obligatory, routine, and collective, and an even greater waning of all that is spontaneous, inspired, creative, and original, and which is only conceivable in the sphere of the individual].

While these sentiments are very much in keeping with Vargas Llosa's apparent move to the political Right, their very stridency, and the fact that they are spoken by a curiously flat, uninteresting character, lend them an air of inauthenticity that is strikingly similar to that of Arguedas' political posturing, in his case from the Left, at the end of Los zorros. It is as if Vargas Llosa were using these rather shrill arguments for a political explanation of his country's, and the world's, ills to persuade not only his readers, but himself as well, knowing all the while that he is not entirely successful. In fact, he undermines his own arguments with the presence of the novel's most intriguing character, the daemonic/demonic child Alfonsito, who adds a mysterious dimension that suggests that even the erotic utopia of the autonomous individual is under threat from outside forces, and that Vargas Llosa's engagement with his demons is not yet over.

The issues Arguedas and Vargas Llosa explore in the novels studied here have been appropriated by postmodernists; however, it is clear that they are by no means limited to any particular temporal or spatial locus, but are elements of what can and must be called the human condition. The still fuzzy, ill-defined *mélange* of ideas and attitudes called postmodernism consists above all in

the affectation of a posture of distance toward fragmentation, disorder, encroaching chaos and its concomitant violence: in some cases it appears as blasé acceptance, in others as amused disdain, and it chooses to use irony rather than *engagement* as a means of dealing with the situation.

For Arguedas and Vargas Llosa, however, the issues are too important to be dismissed. They are, in fact, matters of life and death, and demand to be confronted regardless of the price. For Arguedas, the price is high: his inability to come to terms with the disintegration of his world and the emergence of another, alien order costs him not only his life, but a measure of his artistic and intellectual integrity as well. For Vargas Llosa, the price is *desengaño* and retreat, but not, I suspect, total defeat. Rather, he seems to be allowing his wounds to heal as he gathers together his resources for yet another battle, this time against an enemy who has a face.

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"Mess as the Natural State: Reflections of Bakhtin and Heisenberg in Carlos Fuentes's Cristóbal Nonato" (Hispanic Journal 15, Fall 1994).

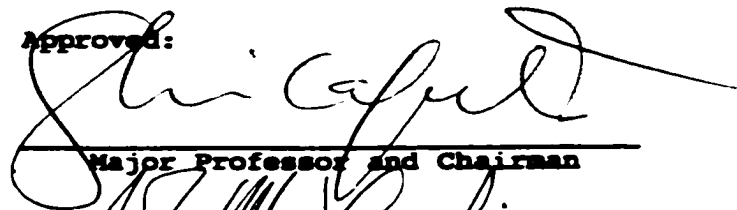
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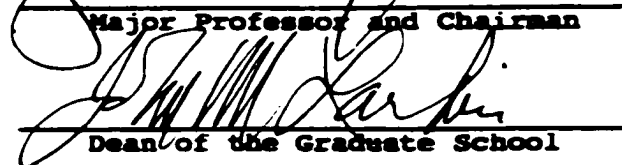
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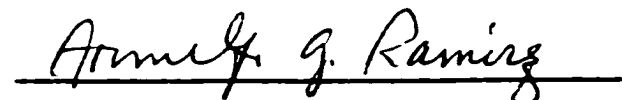
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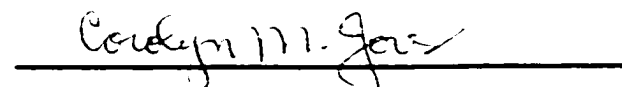

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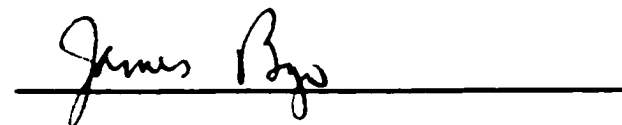
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